

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

Horizon

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

THE LITERATURE OF EXTREME SITUATIONS BY ALBERT VOTAW

A FRAGMENT OF LIFE STORY BY DENTON WELCH

ON THE ANALYSIS OF MORAL JUDGEMENTS BY A. J. AYER

MATTA AND THE NEW REALITY BY PIERRE MABILLE

SAN SEBASTIAN BY RYUNOSUKE AKUTAGAWA

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THE LITERATURE OF EXTREME SITUATIONS

IN the Greek theatre scenes of violence took place off-stage. These sad and awful events were revealed to the audience only through the spoken words of the play's characters. Recently women fainted and riots broke out when in Sartre's play, *The Unburied Dead*, men were physically tortured on the stage.

The theme of pure violence has become central to literature today. Modern literature has come more and more to deal with lonely men in extreme situations—that is, in situations in which the use of power is so radically unbalanced that communication becomes virtually impossible. The relationships between master and slave, between torturer and victim, replace the collaboration of equals, which was the material of previous literatures. It seems that it is only by the blind violence of his reactions that the modern hero can somehow overcome his stupor and his despair, when confronted by the huge and hostile universe within which, abandoned by both friends and witnesses, he must make his way.

KAFKA AND MISS BLANDISH

It is not by accident that many of the literary ancestors of this literature of extreme situations are Americans. For the American imaginative writer, who was never 'kept' by an aristocracy and whose production was never highly regarded by the hustling American middle class, was the first to develop fully the themes of loneliness, violence, and despair which seem so close to reality to many contemporary readers. The violence and frustration of these 'American' writers, lost in the vast reaches of the New World, appeal to the modern European intellectual, who feels similarly abandoned in an historical process which, since no European country can be legitimately considered a great power, has ceased to be meaningful to him. Theirs is a particularly successful presentation of problems which many today, and with good reason, feel to be vital.

Like this 'American' genre, modern literature expresses the absurd necessity and the naked violence of man's solitary revolt against himself. And the literature of extreme situations has pushed these themes to an extreme in utilizing a development which pervades the whole literature of our times. For in a certain sense the literature-type for the generation which considers itself trapped between the Second and the Third World Wars is a symbiotic union of the modern detective story with the novels of Kafka.

The absurd universe of Franz Kafka awakened a response in the unhappy conscience of many an intellectual today. For them the world is only slightly more horrible than the nightmarish universe through which Kafka's heroes pass as if in a fourth dimension, without ever realizing any real contact. Kafka's anonymous heroes are condemned to a meaningless struggle with the minutiae of everyday existence while seemingly oblivious to the horrible absurdities of the world in which they are imprisoned; they must go through the motions of ordinary living whilst thrown into situations whose every aspect is a cruel mockery of normal life. In *The Castle*, K. arrives in a little village, to which he has been sent to exercise his trade. But he cannot begin to work until he is received at the castle, which dominates the village and from which all media of communication are systematically cut. Thus K. must continue his obstinate and inevitably fruitless attempts to gain entry to the castle without ever daring seriously to explore the possibilities of settling down *without* first passing by the castle. Likewise in *The Trial*, Joseph K. occupies his time with the inanities of daily existence while knowing all the time that he will one day be tried and convicted by a court whose function he ignores and under a law he does not know for a crime of which he is never accused.

It would be a mistake to regard Kafka's work exclusively from this angle. But in these two novels, as in his other works, one of the most important elements is certainly his picture of the hero, worried about the minor inconsistencies and problems of living while at the same time either unconscious of or resigned to the monstrous absurdities of the system within which he lives. Thus it would seem that the heroes of Kafka are not the genuine modern heroes. They are to a certain extent at one with their universe, as the heroes of the medieval farces and miracle plays were at one

with their, to us, absurd universe of prayer, miracles and salvation. The salient mark of the modern hero is not simply that he is not at one with his universe, that he is estranged. *He is also in revolt.* Although his universe is Kafka's, his attitude is not.

If, ironically enough, it is to an intellectual that we owe the first full presentation of the absurd, this is not so with violence. The increasing emphasis on pure violence forms an integral part of the development of what we might call popular literature: the comics, the pulps, the detective stories, etc. The heavy-handed display of sexuality and violence in the comics today are a far cry from the innocent anti-social activities of the 'Thimble Theatre', 'The Captain and the Kids', or 'Krazy Kat'. Similarly remarkable is the shift from the cerebral exercise of Sherlock Holmes to the perverted brutality of the modern murder mystery.

There are two essential elements in the modern detective story which relate it to the literature of extreme situations. In the first place, the hero operates outside of the conventions of society. He is frequently a private detective, who, although formally dedicated to upholding law and order, can accomplish this only by violating certain of the laws of the society he is theoretically defending. His capabilities and achievements are sharply contrasted with the unimaginative and unproductive blunderings of the orthodox guardians of the peace. His activity is revolutionary in the sense that it ignores the legal framework of society. Like the political revolutionary, who justifies his destructive work by an appeal to the fundamental laws of society, he must violate the existing laws in the name of a higher good. And both figures, who stand alone, thrown back entirely on their own individual resources, must expiate their anti-social acts by the periodic submission to violence.

The other essential element of the modern detective story is, precisely, this presentation of violence. Violence is an integral part of the actions of those who, standing alone, violate custom in the name of some higher good. Literary tradition utilizes violence primarily as a means: it is the inevitable companion of those who deal regularly with the naked forces of power; it is also the expiatory mechanism by which the hero recognizes the superiority of society. But in the modern detective story a significant shift has occurred: violence becomes an end in itself. The description

of gratuitous violence, frequently accompanied by marked sexual over-tones, has become more and more important. Especially in films or in the comics has the visual display of this gratuitous violence become primary. Aside from the subtle, perverted sexual gratification such scenes afford, the exercise of violence is a method by which the modern hero can purge himself of his guilty feelings of hatred against the stifling and hostile stupidity of the mediocrities who represent society, the crowd, the human race—all those ugly absurdities against which he is in revolt. Our time is, however, not a revolutionary time; thus the heroes of popular literature must always ultimately submit to the recognized authorities—moral or legal. It is only in the works of those writers who are in conscious revolt against society that this violence is permitted to remain in its unregenerate purity.

The development of this literature of extreme situations dates back into the last century. From Russia came the haunted cry of Dostoevski, presenting in his characters the passions of men who, fearing that God was dead, asked whether, now, everything was permitted. The adolescent Rimbaud poured out his hatred against God, society, and mankind; then denied his own poetic achievement to run guns in Abyssinia. The 'American' school highlighted these themes of estrangement and violence. For the first time, too, these themes were combined with the theme of social revolution, although it is significant that the heroes of even these writers remained isolated—like Robert Jordan, pressed on his belly in the sun, waiting for a violent and lonely death. So it is not surprising that today, after the death of so many illusions, these themes should reach their full development, not only in the writings of, for instance, the French existentialists (whom we consider to have most consciously exploited the possibilities of a literature of extreme situations) and of Camus, but also in the works of a host of other writers.

These themes—isolation, frustration, absurdity, violence—are entangled with a passionate assertion of human worth and dignity. Today's literature of extreme situations, although fully aware of the depravity of man, is not a literature of resignation or of conformity. In contrast with both Kafka and the detective story, then, it is a literature of conscious revolt. And its themes pervade almost the entirety of modern literature, so much so that in writers whose conclusions differ radically, there is a striking similarity, even to

the extent of a near identity of language, in their presentation of certain key problems.

Ignazio Silone's recent play, *And He Hid Himself*, is a clear-cut call for a return to the primitive Christian ethic—hardly a Sartrean approach. Yet his characters, victimized by their own fear, can overcome their misery by the simple resolute decision (a familiar existentialist stand-by) to deny this fear. We have come to join the underground, say, in effect, the peasants at the end of Silone's play, because we want to exorcize the dishonour and fear which are rotting out our land. This is, as Jupiter tells Egistus in Sartre's *Flies*, the secret of the gods: 'Once liberty has exploded in the soul of a man, the gods can do nothing against that man.'¹ This is also the vulnerable spot of the Plague: '... all that is necessary is for a man to surmount his fear and to revolt, and his (the Plague's) machine begins to break down.'² And the words of Silone's Fascist doctor, who states that he feels as if collaboration with the Fascist regime in Italy has somehow prevented him from living, are remarkably like those of Garcin (*No Exit*) or of Mathieu (*Age of Reason*), searching for *their* act, for the act which will give their life meaning, for the freedom without which their life has wasted away.

Equally striking, and much more frequently noted, are the similarities between Sartre and Malraux, whose essay, *Temptation of the Occident* (1925), Sartre has admitted, contains almost all of the themes of existentialist philosophy. (Malraux has also evoked the myth of Sisyphus, later to be developed by Camus.) For Malraux society is not evil or unreasonable: it is merely absurd—just that, no more and no less. Each man knows that he has chosen neither to be born nor to die; and what he resents more than anything else is the fact that the world is completely independent of him—of his very existence as well as of his desires. Man is, in fact, nothing but his acts. He is, therefore, isolated from his fellows, who are not his peers but those who judge him. (The theme of Sartre's *No Exit* is precisely that a man can be judged only by his acts, not at all by his ideals or hopes. And Sartre has pushed to an extreme this analysis of the Regard of another; it is this regard

¹ *Les Mouches*, from Sartre, *Theatre I*, Paris: Gallimard, 1947, p. 79. Here, as in all cases where reference is made to a French publication, the translation is the present writer's.

² Albert Camus, *État de Siège*, Paris: Gallimard, 1948, p. 178.

which, by destroying the personal universe which an individual carefully constructs about himself, immobilizes him and transforms him into something regarded, thus, in effect, judging him.) And, finally, Malraux's remark in *Man's Hope*, that death transforms life into destiny, thus fixing it in its ultimate absurdity and contingency, has been frankly utilized by Sartre in his own analysis of death in *Being and Nothingness*.

Similar themes, we have said, but different conclusions. For, unlike Silone, Sartre is frankly atheist, feeling that the concept of God is logically untenable and spiritually debilitating. And unlike Malraux, who is eternally in revolt and whose characters deny that any social transformation can ease the burden of their inmost alienation, Sartre seems definitely to feel that, although no social change can *in itself* improve man's condition, certain profound social changes are necessary before men can hope successfully to shake off their bad faith and spiritual misery.

EXISTENTIALISM AND THE ROMANTIC PROTEST

Much has been made of the similarities between existentialism and Romanticism. The unhappy conscience of the existential hero has been identified with the Romantic *mal de siècle* of the post-Napoleonic era. And to a certain extent this comparison is justified. Many of the existentialist philosophers utilized the currents of, especially, the English and German Romantics. (Heidegger, for example was especially fond of Hölderlin and Rilke.) Jean Wahl has categorically related the Romantic and existentialist periods since, in both, poetry and philosophy are combined and the strange is made familiar and the familiar strange (a feeling echoed by Rocquelin, hero of Sartre's first novel, *Nausea*).

But an even more important similarity is that in both cases the point of departure is a reaffirmation of the individual. This is a logical result of an age in which the basic values of a civilization are in question and when the old society is disintegrating. Unable to find comfort in the ideals of the society into which he was born, the intellectual is forced to look for them within himself—and within other individuals.

French classical philosophy and literature moved within certain prescribed and well-defined limits. Within these limits there was, of course, room for discussion and conflict. But, globally speaking,

society and the universe were well ordered. Similarly in the late nineteenth century, although God was ignored or suppressed, the universe was clearly defined and Progress reigned benignly over the world. The formal structure and limited vocabulary of French classical literature were destroyed by the structural and linguistic effusion of Romanticism in the same fashion that the discoveries of modern physics have destroyed the mechanistic universe of nineteenth-century liberalism by demolishing its concepts of space, time, and causality. In the first case, the literary crisis became apparent immediate with the downfall of the Old Regime; in the second, it has taken the scientifically controlled atrocities of Auschwitz and of Hiroshima to sear on the literary consciousness that, if God does not exist, there is no reason for men to act as if He still did.

The parallel between the existentialist and Romantic protests becomes even more striking when one compares the political situation of France after the Napoleonic wars with the situation today. The French Romantic had grown up with his whole youth directed towards participation in the revolutionary conquests of Napoleon. With the defeat at Waterloo, the whole purpose was brutally torn from the lives of that generation, (e.g. Alfred de Musset, *Confessions d'un Enfant du Siècle*, and Alfred de Vigny, *Grandeurs et Servitudes Militaires*.) Similarly, many young French writers pinned their hopes on the Communist revolution and, subsequently, on the Liberation. Both were felt to be identical with socialism and with the realization of that type of society in which these writers felt they could lose their despair. But the French Communist Party, especially after the Nazi-Soviet Pact, has bitterly disappointed many French intellectuals; and the fond hopes which were entertained at the Liberation have, finally, been quietly murdered by the sordid realities of the Fourth Republic. Thus, as in 1815, a whole generation has suddenly been deprived of its ideal and its reason for existence.

This terrible isolation explains the popularity today of those writers whose situation was, precisely, marked by their lack of sympathy with the most dynamic social force of their time. The French Romantics were anti-bourgeois: whether monarchist, anti-political, or subsequent participants in the political battle for bourgeois democracy, they all despised and condemned the mediocrity, stupidity, and lack of aesthetic sensitivity of the

middle class.¹ Camus and the French existentialists, in revolt against their society, are nevertheless, with the exception of Merleau-Ponty, equally anti-Stalinist. This stand, when one considers the vast influence of Stalinism among French intellectuals, can only accentuate the loneliness of these writers. And it is significant that Sartre's criticism of Stalinism—lack of good faith, anti-intellectualism, degeneration, etc.—parallels remarkably the Romantic attacks on the French bourgeoisie, both being almost exclusively literary in nature.

There are, then, two important ways in which the existentialists resemble the Romantics: both formulated an affirmation of individual worth as an antidote to the dissolution of society about them; both stood isolated from the new dynamic force of their time. In spite of these similarities, however, the existentialists differ from the Romantics in certain aspects so basic that the usual simple comparison between the two is misleading. In the first place, the military defeat of Napoleon, although reversing the revolutionary wave with which the young Romantics identified themselves, left them at least the Napoleonic legend and the dream of the Republic. Ideals are always easier to retain if the movements with which they are identified live on only in the imagination. On the contrary, those writers who once identified their ideas with the Soviet regime, have no such easy escape. They are constantly at grips with the Stalinist apparatus, the unburied, stinking corpse of their ideals. They cannot, therefore, look back nostalgically towards the revolutionary past, villainously and unfairly murdered by The Enemy. The comforting presence of an ideal, pure and undefiled by actuality, is denied these modern writers. Faced with an only too real movement, which claims to embody their ideals, they are thus more fully demoralized than were ever their Romantic predecessors.

More demoralized and infinitely more alone. The Romantics were, almost without exception, both deeply religious and profoundly attached to nature. But even this solace is denied the modern intellectual. For many of them belief in God is impossible;

¹ Similarly, Dostoevski was opposed to the western ideas then infiltrating into Russia. Rimbaud rejected the entirety of bourgeois society, including its movements of protest; Kafka likewise, although in a less categorical fashion. The 'Americans', isolated from American society, could never fully enter the Stalinist church.

they have retained this much, at least, of nineteenth-century liberalism. To resurrect God at this point—as has done, for instance, Silone—would be a denial of their entire past and a surrender to a force which has nothing in common with their own aspirations. Nature, too, is cold and disinterested in man's fate. Especially for those influenced by the existentialist emphasis on man's basic non-affinity with nature, the beauty and power of nature are no solace. No matter how loudly man in his anguish may cry out, the gods are unmoved and nature rests stony and silent. With no possible comfort available outside of his own tortured soul, the modern hero—and especially the existentialist hero—is more lonely than any man has ever been.

THE CONCENTRATION-CAMP UNIVERSE

If the modern hero is more lonely than the Romantic, he is not as alone. If the Romantic expressed his anguish in solitude, the modern hero is usually in—and against—the crowd. And, interestingly enough, this crowd is composed mainly of prisoners.

It is highly significant that the specific form which the literature of extreme situations most frequently takes is that of a literature of prisons, or, most recently, of concentration camps. This is not only true in a broadly metaphorical sense—in which one might say that the heroes of Kafka are imprisoned in the absurd universe about them, or that Faulkner's characters are imprisoned in a little village in Mississippi. The undertones of frustration and impotence, from which the modern hero can only emerge by pure violence, are being localized more and more in real prisons and prison camps. Prison is home for the characters of Malraux, Koestler, and Rousset. Camus's *Stranger* finishes his days in prison; and the characters of his second novel are imprisoned in a pestilential city. In Sartre's works, the themes of prison are even more emphasized: the heroes of *The Wall*, *No Exit*, and *The Unburied Dead*, are literally imprisoned; the characters of *Red Gloves* (as 'Dirty Hands' has been mis-translated) have imprisoned themselves in their flight from prison. Many of his other characters are enclosed within walls which, if not prison walls, serve as their equivalent. Marcelle, holed up in her room, faces the problems of freedom differently than does Mathieu, the drifter, the inauthentic, who is free to move from room to room (*Age of Reason*). The helpless invalids in *The Reprieve*, symbols of a decaying

society, are glued in their beds, powerless even to respond to their bodily necessities without outside help. More and more the characters of modern fiction, whose actions are increasingly limited within the walls of the bedroom or the bar, are coming to reassemble the inhabitants of a vast prison camp.

To a certain extent this prison-camp literature is an extension of the flood of accounts which followed the collapse of Hitler's Reich. Deportees, internees, forced labourers, 'anti-social elements', prisoners-of-war—all of these categories had a story to tell. And, to the horror and initial incredulity of their audiences, their stories were remarkably similar. Almost without exception they told of how the concentration camp had, itself, become a society, cemented together by naked violence and terror and organized for certain absurd purposes which defy explanation by any classical liberal formulae. Almost all told of how it was the prisoners themselves, organized into veritable social classes, who administered the camps, fought among themselves for power, and were each others' torturers. Some of these accounts were written by men who needed to purge themselves in this way of an experience which, by its revelation of the infinite possibilities of man's inhumanity towards man, paralysed their will and infected their soul. Others were written by former members of the concentrationary upper class, justifications after the event for the atrocities they had to perpetuate in order to gain a few comforts for themselves and for some of their comrades. Still others are serious sociological studies, analyses, and warnings. But no matter what their nature, these accounts testify to the condition of men who have just escaped the concentration camp universe of the Nazis to discover the same system engulfing their country from the East; of men who have just passed through a period in which arrest or deportation had become the symbol of manhood.

But this is only a partial explanation. There are other, deeper reasons for the terrible actuality of the concentration camp literature. Certain themes which have been pointed up by this literature were already exploited generally in modern literature, and this well before the war. The historical fact that Nazi Germany imprisoned millions of persons, cannot account for the fact that modern literature, after first becoming a literature of extreme situations in general, is now becoming a literature of concentration camps in particular. Neither can it account for the marked

similarity of treatment and theme between the existentialist and the concentrationary universe.

It would seem that in the concentration camp are realized more completely than ever before certain philosophic themes common to most existential thinkers but most fully developed by Sartre. For instance, the basic theme of man's existence is, philosophically, that he is thrown into a world without his willing it and with no place prepared for him. The situation, precisely, of those who, for no apparent reason—or, at least, not as the result of any 'criminal' act on their part—found themselves imprisoned; and this not in a prison, where their cell was prepared in advance, but in a camp, where they would have to wrest their bunk space from their fellow prisoners. The refusal on the part of certain prisoners to believe that they were really arrested and that some error had not been made; their compulsive faith that the laws of justice they were accustomed to would prevail even under the regime of terror (a feeling heightened in the Soviet camps by the practice of plastering the walls with revolutionary slogans)—these attitudes only increased the difficulties of adjustment. (In Sartre's philosophy these sterile tentatives, which follow man's refusal to recognize the absurdity of his situation, are called 'bad faith'.) The mental disintegration of newly arrived elements in the camps, as described by psychological observers, is paralleled by the feeling of abandonment and anguish of Kierkegaard or Sartre.

Even more striking than this general similarity are the near-identity of certain quite specific themes in both existentialism and the concentration camp literature. For the existentialists, one of the main problems of human existence is the flight from the crowd. The enervating anonymity which the mass engenders is one of the chief obstacles to a genuinely individual existence. In the concentration camp, the flight from the crowd takes on more urgency. For it is precisely the omnipresence of the crowd which completes the social disintegration of the prisoners. One is never alone: one eats in crowds, gulping down the food to prevent someone from stealing it; one walks and relaxes with a crowd; transportation is *en masse*; bodily functions must be performed hastily and amidst the jostling and smell of other bodies; and, ultimately, one sleeps with a crowd—not just in the presence of others, but twenty men on a shelf, for instance, packed so tightly together that one man cannot turn from one side to the other without forcing the whole

group to do likewise. In such a situation it is easy to understand why 'Hell is the others', why there is no need for torturer or stake; the condemned serve themselves—cafeteria style.¹

It is in precisely this aspect that the concentration camps differ from the prisons. In the latter, at least, the prisoner can retain his own dignity. When he is arrested, he is put into *his* cell. The prison administration looks to him: he is fed, interrogated, moved from cell to cell, etc. But all the while it is *he* who is the centre of a certain concern. Even under torture, it is still an individual's freedom and dignity which is in question: the one attacking, the other defending them. To be tortured means, for the victim, that he, as an individual, is considered as possessing something which the torturer desires. A man may or may not confess under torture. But he is never systematically degraded and demoralized, by accident as it were, as is the unfortunate inmate of a prison camp.

In such a situation it is easy to understand the prisoner's pre-occupation with his own body. As in Sartre's philosophy, it is by and through his own physical body—which at times he can regard as if he were regarding any other thing—that a man comes into relationship with the world about him. And this brute, physical thing is contingent and superfluous; it is *in excess*, with its pains, its sores, its smells, and its inadaptability. The prisoner becomes nauseated with his own body; if only he were not condemned to exist through this thing, how much less disgusting life would be. Certain accounts describe various prisoners regarding their diseased extremities with the almost ontological detachment of Sartre's analysis of the body in *Being and Nothingness*.

To escape from the terrible present, the prisoners exploited as fully as possible their dreams, reveries, and imagination. At night the prisoners frequently dreamed of vast spaces, of intricately finished works of art, of banquets, or of their hoped-for life after release—on the other side of the wall. During the day-time the occasional sight or memory of a beautiful scene or, above all, the constant reverie of his life which was and which was to be maintained the prisoner in a sort of never-never world, where past and future combined to make a present in which time had stopped. These dreams—these projects, if we may use the existentialist term—coloured the prisoners' existence. These dream-projects, especially those involving ultimate liberation, protected the

¹ Sartre, *Huis Clos*, in *Theatre I*, op. cit., pp. 133-4, 167.

prisoner from his surroundings; around them he organized his concentration-camp universe. The project and imagination, as in Sartre's psychology, became the primary mode of perception.

It is important that, in spite of the terror and in spite of the degradation, there was a certain area of free choice which, to a large extent, could determine a prisoner's chance of survival. We refer, of course, to the decision which almost every prisoner at one time had to make regarding the extent of his co-operation with the camp administration. This was in every sense of the word a free choice. Although this freedom can hardly be compared to the freedom of the British housewife to buy one of several brands of tooth-paste, it is infinitely more vital. Freedom, in this situation, is not a mere word; it is at the very heart of the prisoner's existence. That Sartre chose, then, to develop Hegel's discussion of the master and the slave in his own explication of liberty is only one more striking example of the appropriateness of his philosophy to the most important single experience of our times.

(This startling similarity extends even to certain minor points in the two literatures. In *Being and Nothingness*, for example, Sartre discusses the use of language, not as an instrument, but as one of the basic conducts of man, equal to love, desire, hate, etc. In the concentration camps, language was, likewise, a veritable conduct—the only free conduct, actually. For the one thing which the guards could not do in the Nazi camps was force the foreign prisoners to speak German. Recognizing this, these men revelled in the use of their native tongue, especially when in earshot of the guards. For the German prisoners their linguistic expression was in songs, some of which were sung with such vigour that they were eventually forbidden.)

The concentration camp is not, however, society. But the actuality of the literature of extreme situations is due ultimately to the fact that in the concentration camp is realized nothing more than the logical extension of certain aspects of modern society. This is obvious in the totalitarian states, where, as in the concentration camps, it is terror which holds the society together. But even in the more democratic states, social disintegration and irresponsibility, the forerunners of terror, are playing an increasing role. The subjugation of individual initiative to the enervating and unpredictable pressures of almost every aspect of a mass-production society is not unconnected with the naked brutality

of a forced labour camp. The popularity of the concentration-camp literature is one indication of the unconscious fear that in these books is a prediction of man's fate.

The most obvious precursor of the forced labour camp is the assembly line. The intuitive discoveries of, for example, the Chaplin film, *Modern Times*, have been only recently studied systematically. It has been found that the monotony of work, the long trips to and from work, and the anonymous, mass existence of the factory worker in everything connected with his job result in widespread lack of initiative, demoralization, and an unhealthy complex of unexpressed resentment and guilt feelings. Like the prison camp inmate, the factory worker is, in many cases, nothing more than a number. Like the former, the factory worker is frequently shifted from job to job, forced to quit 'his' machine for another, for reasons unconnected with any of his immediate experiences—and hence, to him, arbitrary and absurd. And the system of relationships within the factory, including the one and only method of improving one's position—that, is by 'pull'—is mirrored in the concentration camp.

The most shocking aspect of the camps—and that it should be so shocking is itself significant—is the careful elaboration of the scientifically perfected methods of extermination. Nothing was wasted. The prisoners stripped themselves of all their clothing and then went into chambers in which their own body heat released the toxic gases. Afterwards, before burial, they were methodically stripped of hair, gold teeth, etc.—anything that might prove useful. The Nazi death camps, which, it should be remembered, were only *one* type of concentration camp, were a triumph of human ingenuity and science. The dream of the nineteenth century was the perfection of science to the point where man could control his environment. It was felt that this achievement could not but be good. The extermination camps, which were the technical realization of this ideal, have partly dispelled this illusion. As is the case outside the camps, the developments of science have created a nightmare world in which man, like the sorcerer's apprentice, can no longer control the forces he has unleashed. When a society stands on the threshold of a vast upheaval, technological changes develop a momentum of their own which, ever accelerating, upsets and deranges the entire structure of society. And we ordinary mortals, lacking the world-view of the well-paid

preacher or engineer, instinctively react in self-defence against this force. In the technical achievements of the Nazi death camps, many persons saw a justification for their heretical fear of science.

This instinctive fear of science first was marked in popular literature. (Naturally. Since the intellectual, as a member of the middle class, is less defenceless against the ravages of technology than are the lower classes—especially the urban working class.) In both the comics and the films scientists and doctors have become villains. They are those who, by upsetting what was 'ordinary' and 'right', menaced the individual. The white coat of a doctor or of a laboratory worker has become, in many films and comic strips, the symbol of the unnatural and the horrible.

Finally, the concentration camp is the inevitable component of a society in which democratic procedures have been replaced by authoritarianism. This destruction of democracy is, unfortunately, not a simple matter of the triumph of evil men over good. It seems to be the almost inevitable outcome of a society which has become too big and too complicated. Factories and trade unions, private organizations and the state: all are heavily bureaucratized. These new behemoths, self-winding and self-regenerating, come more and more to dominate society as they destroy local initiative and responsibility. Thus democratic control becomes impossible: for how is the mass to control the specialist?

In a certain sense, the concentration-camp society is an answer to man's irresponsibility towards man—as in *The Castle* of Kafka no responsible individual interrelationships are possible: everything must be routed through the castle, through channels. Society has become so bureaucratized that no one knows any longer how to assess responsibilities, let alone to understand it fully. The only result can be the disappearance of small, self-governing bodies—what de Tocqueville over one hundred years ago called 'secondary powers'. With them disappear the training schools for democratic decision and control. Amorphous and enervated, the masses reach a point where only the concentration-camp state can control their actions and bring some sort of order—be it an absurd order—out of the chaos into which an overly bureaucratized society falls when it stubbornly clings to the ineffective machinery of liberal democracy.

The concentration camp is more than an experience. It is a portent and a warning. And modern literature, whose subject

matter has become that of extreme situations and, specifically, of concentration camps, is a primitive reaction to this development. The French existentialists have then, in response to this situation, chosen merely to point up the themes of frustration, isolation, and futile violence, which pervade the whole of modern literature. They have not invented them.

DENTON WELCH
A FRAGMENT
OF LIFE STORY

FOR some reason I have begun to think again of that late January afternoon at the beginning of the war when my curious fat friend Touchett took me to the Parish Hall to see a religious film. The film was thirty years old, and Touchett kept telling me this, wanting me to marvel at its age.

I had gone with him to strange meetings before. Once it had been to a lecture on Corporal Punishment at the Baptist Hall, where he heckled the poor schoolmaster until I became very embarrassed. And another time we had left the Adult School hurriedly when some of the adult scholars, not caring for the political tone of the speaker, began to throw scalding coffee and the rather solid buns which had been provided for refreshment.

I had been very ill; so I told Touchett now, when he asked me to go to yet another meeting, that I did not feel strong enough for scenes. He assured me that the parishioners would behave perfectly.

But as we took our seats at half-past three on that sullen afternoon, something seemed to click inside me. I couldn't bear the smell of the parishioners' furs, or the sight of the tatty bows on their hats. I couldn't bear the smell of the raw wood chairs, or the feel of their rush seats through my trousers. I couldn't bear the blistering, disintegrating, flicker of the ancient film. The silver spots and smears tore across the camels, transfixed the asses, raced down the flat-roofed buildings, and made Jesus' face into a painful jig-saw puzzle.

There is no doubt about it, I was overcome with the horror of living. It was too disgusting for any words.

I jerked myself to my feet and pushed roughly by Touchett, who quavered after me in a babyish whisper: 'What's wrong with you? Are you going to be sick?'

Still looking straight in front, I said. 'I can't bear it any more; it's awful!'

'Don't you like the film?' he asked. 'It'll get even better soon; and, as you know, it's thirty years old, and has probably been preserved specially for us by Providence.'

Anyone not knowing him would have thought that he was serious. There were subdued murmurs of 'hush'. I made for the door blindly. I seemed to be almost fighting my way to it. I half fell as I caught hold of the handle.

The cold air blowing on me struck me as pleasant in some way, but I could not tell why. I did not seem able to explain anything to myself. I even wondered why the light was so weak on this winter afternoon.

I began to walk down the town. I crossed the bridge and still followed the High Street until I came to the great black station-yard where the trains were shunting and snorting. On the other side of the road, outside the Public Library, a youth stood, whistling mournfully and hunching his shoulders. He wore no overcoat and several buttons of his shirt were undone, so that his meagre bare chest could be seen. But his lips were the colour of watered milk, and the smart nickel belt-buckle quivered against his flat stomach.

Fascinated by his bravado, I stared for some moments; then he noticed me, and glared back so balefully that I let the wind sweep me on at once.

I looked up at the spire of St. Stephen's Church. It appeared to me as a huge sharpened stake, put there by God for an instrument of torture. I imagined a gigantic body hurtling down from heaven and landing on this spike, pierced through the belly, the arms and legs spread-eagled and turning like windmills in their agony. I saw the long golden hair hanging down to the earth in heavy ropes and nets, with enormous drops of blood caught and held between the strands. I saw the wonderful Ancient British chieftain's face—like Caradoc's in an old engraving—with flaxen moustaches round a crying Greek statue's mouth. The eyes I saw as a statue's eyes too; blank, and blind.

All this time, while I gazed so long at the tower, a policeman

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must have been watching me, for he now called out jocosely: 'Can't you tell the time yet, mate? You counting it up?'

I wanted to spit on him, to swear, to shock him, to wake him up. How I hated all policemen!

I started to run up the hill, towards the Doctor's house. He had been in my mind all this time. I pushed through the dripping bushes at the gate; one of them had an aromatic smell which I shall always remember, for as I passed, I tore off a piece and crushed it between my fingers. I ran round to the drawing-room window, concentrating on the smell of the crushed leaves, knowing that I was storing it up in my memory.

Already the curtains were drawn, but I flattened the side of my face to the pane and saw, through a chink, the corner of a cream-painted bookcase, the edge of the standard-lamp, and a few strands of dog-basket. The walnut glow of the wireless, the treacly stain on the deal boards, and the dove-grey carpet, struck me as more than ordinarily smug and complacent.

'Quiet good taste,' I murmured to myself; then, liking the silly words, I said them again quite loudly. They rang out in the stillness. I was in a terror, expecting the window to be thrown up at any moment. But nothing happened; only the little Aberdeen moved. For a moment it crossed my line of vision; and I thought that it looked exactly like an amazing little middle-aged, middle-class gentleman.

'O little Aberdeen,' I prayed,

'Sitting upon the floor inside,

'I'd, free from any thought of sin,

'Become your melancholy bride.'

The idiotic rhyme struck me as so full of meaning that I remembered again with hot shame the time when, as a child, I had asked: 'Grandpa, what would happen if a man married a dog?' This too, had been 'free from any thought of sin'. I had merely imagined a rococo scene with a fat spaniel, dressed in a veil and orange blossom, emerging from a Gothic Revival church on the arm of a well-groomed gentleman. But my grandfather had been too outraged and shocked to say more than 'Don't speak of it! Don't speak of it!' And so my question had gone unanswered.

Now, as I watched the final tremble and creak of the basket's edge, as the dog settled, I felt deserted by all the world. I knew that no one anywhere would ever have pity on me again. I saw

all the hard granite faces set in a long range against me. I walked up hills and down valleys between avenues of granite faces.

And suddenly I felt that I must get into the house, that I could no longer stay outside. I guessed that the french window of the study would be unlocked. I turned the handle very softly and slipped into the dark room.

I could smell the medical books and the rack of neglected pipes. I huddled into the heavy curtain behind the door, and for a moment felt comforted because I was no longer outside; but at the thought of the cold garden I was so overcome with sorrow for myself that I began to cry quite uncontrollably. I made noises like an animal or a musical instrument, squeezing out my breath or hissing it in through my teeth, muttering things that finished on a little scream, like steam escaping. I nursed my crying, wishing for it never to stop.

When at last the drawing-room door opened and steps came towards me, I crouched down lower to the ground in an ecstasy of hope and fear and shame. I wanted to become smaller and smaller—to become a kitten, a rat, a mouse, crouched at someone's feet in the dark.

The light was switched on, and there was a moment while he looked round the room before seeing me behind the door.

'What are you doing in here?' he asked, assuming that tone of shocked surprise which nurses use when children wet themselves. 'You mustn't get into people's houses and hide behind doors, you know!'

He pulled me up to my feet and held me against him, to steady me, for I was trembling violently with lust and fear. For a moment I felt secure and serene. I no longer had to think for myself. I was even being held up and supported physically. Oh, it was lovely! I wanted to walk about, closely guarded like that for ever. I dug my fingers into his arm fiercely, trying to get at the bone through the flesh.

Then, very gently, I felt him withdrawing. He still held me, but there was a tiny gap between our bodies, and his arms had gone rigid. I was so enraged that I flung away from him and made for the window, cursing and swearing at him with all the filthiest words I could remember. 'You f—— beast, you b—— rat!' I screamed.

He called my name urgently, and seemed about to follow me

into the garden, but something made him change his mind; for, the moment I was outside the french window, he came forward and bolted it sharply. His face seemed almost wickedly triumphant, as he looked out at me through the greenish glass.

‘Go home and go to bed,’ he said sternly, before he turned away. I rushed round the corner of the house and plastered my ear again to the drawing-room window. I heard him come in and say something to his wife and her friend. One of them answered him.

‘What a pity!’ she said. ‘He’s so young. It must be terribly difficult to know what to do.’

I stood there fascinated and delighted;—they were talking about me! I strained to hear every word, and was rewarded with remarks about parents, money, curious taste in clothes, and undirected sex life. All the cruel words were varnished and stuck together with pity. I screamed out against the appalling caricature. My scream set up a tiny, wiry, vibration in the window glass. I could feel it on the tips of my fingers.

There was no answer, unless the silencing of the voices could be called an answer.

A sudden thrill and exaltation passed through me. I ran to the front door and rang the bell, hardly knowing what I did. The maid let me in just as he crossed the hall. He came towards me purposefully. I started to shout.

‘What an amusing time you all must have discussing me! Do go on, I want to hear some more.’ Then I giggled and laughed.

He caught hold of my arm, and was about to put me out of the door, when I shot out my other hand and clutched the banisters. They creaked and moved as he pulled at me roughly. I was amazed; he was using force! Why, he was even hurting me, and he was a doctor! I was exhilarated. Never again would I have to believe that he was entirely good and right. He was being brutal!

My protests grew as my strength gave out. I had to let go of the banisters, and he was jerking me nearer and nearer to the door. I kept on laughing and shouting and swearing to show that I did not care, that I was not almost mad with horror at this last treachery.

With the final desperate jerks I saw the strong hairs on his arms, as his cuffs rode up. Very black hairs, very strong arms, and very gold cuff-links enamelled with school coat of arms. I knew now

that he had lost his temper. It was wonderful. A sort of pure triumph of evil, the moment seemed to me.

The door slammed, and I sat for a moment on the step where I had fallen. Quite suddenly I decided to go home and try to kill myself. I had the little black box of Prontisil tablets he had prescribed for me. I was sure that they were dangerous, for he always asked me anxiously how I felt after taking them.

I ran down the hill. Although my body was still weak, I was filled with a seething energy. The policeman stared at me again as I dashed past the church. This time I did spit, but not until I was several yards away from him.

I crossed the bridge and looked down for one second at the muddy swirling water, half lost in the gathering darkness.

'If he were here to see, I'd jump straight in,' I said aloud.

I ran up the road and let myself into the garden. As I put my key into the front door, I heard someone moving in the sitting-room. I pushed open the door and saw Touchett by the fire.

'Hullo,' he said, smiling sleepily. He looked exactly like a fat 'doctored' cat; I could even imagine whiskers and a tail.

'I thought I'd come round and see what was wrong. Why did you rush off like that?' he asked. 'You *were* stupid, because you missed the Crucifixion which was marvellous. The agony! And the thunder and lightning effects!'

This careful innocence would have enraged me at other times, but now I felt radiantly alive and able to appreciate and embrace everybody and everything.

'Ask Lydia to bring in the supper,' I said; 'I'm just going into the other room to change my shoes.'

I went into my room and sat on the bed, on the velvet-covered eiderdown which I liked so much. Automatically I began to unlace my shoes, until I remembered that this was not at all what I had come to do.

I picked up the little black pillbox with its edging of brilliant magenta. My name, with Esquire after it spelt at full length, looked curiously pompous and important. I opened the box and pulled out the cotton wool; underneath lay the Prontisil tablets in their glowing nest. The magenta flushed their whiteness from all sides. I counted the tablets. There were sixteen.

Surely, I thought, sixteen tablets should have an appalling effect, if taken all at once.

I filled a glass with water and sat down again on the bed. Quite methodically I put the tablets one after another into my mouth, and washed each down with a gulp from the tooth glass.

'It's easy,' I thought, 'I wish I had some more.'

Looking round the room for anything else to take, I had the notion of swallowing a little pair of curved nail-scissors, or of crushing the glass tumbler between my teeth; but I dismissed these as extravagant ideas.

I stood up and heard the last little gurgle inside me, as the final pill and gulp of water chased each other down. I've really done something! I thought. My gaiety mounted up into a huge exuberant wave.

I burst into the other room and saw the steaming soup on the two trays in front of the fire. Touchett was waiting for me politely. Greedy people always do wait politely.

'Have some soup, dear Touchett, some lovely steaming soothing soup,' I shouted. I snatched the decanter from the bureau and slopped a lot of sherry into both soup bowls.

'Now you've probably made it cold,' said Touchett petulantly. He bent over his bowl and took delicate little sips; then, finding it to his liking, he started to empty the spoonfuls down his throat with rude sucking noises.

'You are unbelievably disgusting,' I said, feeling quite affectionate towards him. I slopped more sherry into two glasses, but forgot to stop pouring, so that a little golden waterfall splashed from the glass to the tray, and from the tray to the carpet. My first thought was for a damp cloth; but then I realized with a shock that, in a little time, messes on the floor, far worse than this, would no longer worry me.

I could even throw butter at the walls, I thought, and it wouldn't matter.

At the thought of butter, I spread my biscuits thickly and began to eat. I had become as hungry as a domestic pet.

I must enjoy every moment of *my* Last Supper, I told myself. I poured out glass after glass of sherry for myself and Touchett, until the decanter was empty.

'Now that's finished and there isn't any more,' I said. I felt unhappy.

Touchett gave me a suspicious look; he had placed two of his nicotine-fingers on either side of his right eye, and seemed to be

propping the lids open. It was a curious trick which I had noticed before.

‘Why should you want any more sherry?’ he asked. ‘You usually drink nothing at all, and I can hardly ever get you into a pub.’

I felt a creeping tingling and swimming in my head. I became terrified and thrilled. Suddenly I burst out with what I had done. I wanted to shock and horrify.

‘I’ve just swallowed sixteen Prontisil tablets,’ I shrieked, ‘and I’m beginning to feel very peculiar.’

Touchett gave me an utterly blank stare, like a child looking over the palings of the Infant School playground.

There was a moment of complete silence, then questions gushed out of his mouth.

‘What are they? Are you all right? Why did you do it? Are they dangerous?’

He jumped to his feet and leant forward, breathing heavily. I could smell the tobacco, the beer, the sherry and the soup all mixed up.

I tried to calm him.

‘Don’t be stupid, don’t be stupid. I only feel a little queer.’

I seized a dish and ladled roast potatoes on to his plate. He loved Lydia’s roast potatoes. But Touchett was frightened. He heaved his great body about in the chair and plucked a cigarette from his pocket, not looking at the potatoes. Then he started to wolf them without any of his usual signs of enjoyment. No smacking lips or eager eyes for the next mouthful.

‘Why did you do it?’ he asked again, thoroughly irritated with me for spoiling his evening.

‘I’m still quite all right,’ I said, ‘and we must finish our meal in peace.’

My head was reeling and my eyes seemed to be focusing curiously, so I shut them and saw myself as a small boy standing upon the dressing-table in red and white striped socks. I was standing on the dressing-table so that I could see my socks in the mirror. At that moment I loved the reflection of my red and white socks better than my mother, my father, than all my family put together. . . .

I opened my eyes again and looked at Touchett. I could tell from his sharp furtive glances that he was about to jump up and leave me.

Those nicotined fingers! I thought. Why, there's even a brown patch on the end of his nose! And those unspeakable teeth!

'Touchett,' I said sharply, 'you ought to have your teeth seen to.'

He looked at me.

'You seem to be very censorious all of a sudden,' he said.

'But wouldn't you like to be dashing handsome with a new "guinea set"?' I asked.

He drew himself up and looked very haughty and dignified.

'I'm terrified of dentists,' he said quietly. 'Don't bother to bring out all the old clap-trap about fear of dentists being linked with self abuse. I know it all very much better than you do.'

I stretched out my hands and said: 'Don't go!' Whereupon he lurched to his feet like a frightened bullock.

'You go to bed,' he urged, 'or get the doctor.'

The drumming was rising to a crescendo in my ears. As he pushed his way clumsily to the front door, I followed, snatching up a stick in the hall. We began to walk rapidly in the direction of his house.

My legs were becoming curiously heavy, but I laughed and sang and cracked stupid jokes, saying how disgusting it was to desert someone who was dying. When we got to the fork at the 'Star and Garter' I shouted again.

'You can't go! You can't! What's going to happen to me? I can't be abandoned like this. It's shameful. You're a monster.'

It was midnight. The lights were burning in the silence. Nothing moved.

It's like a stage-set, I thought; and I'm the chief ranter.

'Shall I take you to the doctor's?' Touchett asked half-heartedly.

'Which one?'

He mentioned a name I did not know.

'Yes,' I said; 'if I can get there.'

Then I saw the craven, lazy, light come into his eyes again, and he veered away rapidly, saying: 'Good-night, I really must get home. Go back to bed quickly.'

I screamed oaths and blasphemy after him, still half in fun; then, alone, beginning to be frightened, I wondered what to do.

Somehow I dragged myself home, past each appalling lamp-post. The fire was still burning in the sitting-room. I told myself that there were things to burn, while I was still alive.

I took all the notebooks with my poems, and the rubber draining tubes that I had had in hospital, and threw them on the flames.

The poems crackled gracefully and disappeared, but the rubber spat, sizzled, fried and flamed until the chimney caught fire. Up in the heart of the wall I could hear the roar of the burning soot.

'Quick, quick!' I called to Lydia, 'bring some water, the chimney's on fire.'

She ran in with two blue enamel saucepans. I snatched one from her and threw the water into the grate with delight.

When water hit flame there was some sort of explosion. I jumped back. The room was filled with grey smoke. I saw Lydia like a ghost through the smoke. A little piece of scalding ash struck my cheek.

'It's all right,' I said savagely, to stop all her exclamations. Then I lay down on the sofa and thought that the time had really come. I was in some way losing all the salt and virtue of my senses. All was dumb, muffled, and thickened disgustingly. It was as if all my thoughts were reflected in some ghastly fun-fair mirror, the sort of distorting glass which is never funny, always frightening.

I held my breath for twenty seconds, and then gabbled out the name of Touchett's doctor to Lydia. I spoke so rapidly that she could not understand me. When I repeated myself, she gave me a long look, and then went to the telephone rather unwillingly.

I swayed into the bedroom and fell down on the bed. I lay there wriggling and lashing about, not being able to stay still for a moment, because of the soaring, swelling, pain in my head, and because of my fear at the approach of the doctor.

At last he came. He stood in the middle of the room, not saying anything; then he turned me roughly towards him.

'What's all this?' he asked sternly. He's just like a prefect who's discovered some peculiar goings-on in the disused cricket pavilion, I told myself. He looks just like one too—square head, pink mouth, wide shoulders. Skin smooth as the back of a child, as they say at the B.B.C.

I thought all this because I was very frightened of the doctor and wanted to give myself some courage and bravado; but it was no use, I had none. A terrible wave of self-consciousness made it impossible for me to look at him, but I jerked out something about the tablets, and waited for his awful words.

Suddenly his prefect's manner dropped from him.

'First of all I think we'll try to make you sick,' he said with businesslike gaiety. I laughed; the anti-climax was so funny, such a delicious relief.

He went in search of mustard, hot water, and a spoon.

I drank the yellow stuff in gulps, and waited, expecting to be violently sick. I imagined a horrible bright orange cascade of vomit from my mouth. I hated to be sick in front of the doctor. But nothing happened.

'No go?' he asked, looking at me inquiringly.

'I don't think so,' I said. 'Does it matter, if I'm not sick? Will it be serious?'

'You'll have the hell of a headache for the next day or so, but that's about all,' he said with hearty malice.

I felt dashed. He was laughing at me. I was ridiculous and puerile. I did not know one drug from another. I was ignorant.

'Will you give me something for my head?' I asked, for by now it felt as if it were about to boil and crack open.

'Much better not,' he said, 'you've taken quite enough for one night!'

He laughed and joked, teasing me, making a fool of me; then he suddenly broke off and said: 'The ridiculous is sometimes very near to the sublime.'

I was startled; the remark was so sententious, so out of character. He's saying it specially for me, I thought, specially to make me feel good inside again. And I was very grateful, and tried to forget my resentment at his seeming unconcern about the Prontisil tablets.

At last he took up his hat and his case. He came forward ceremoniously, like a prefect again, only this time a nice prefect, congratulating someone on playing well in a match.

'Let's shake hands,' he said.

I sat up in bed and held mine out. We shook hands. It was not silly, although it was very artificial.

Shaking hands is much more solemn and full of meaning than kissing, I thought. You kiss your aunt, you kiss your pet cat, but you never think of shaking hands with them like this.

I cannot tell whether I slept that night. I know that I first felt a certain happiness and comfort which was soon swallowed up by the terrible pain in my head. I know that this growing, bursting pain made me open and shut my eyes. Each time I opened them

I saw the white mantelpiece palely glimmering in the darkness. The mantelpiece seemed to bend and cockle and become alive. Its flatness twisted into things that were nearly arms and legs. It seemed to swell towards me, then recede. And I seemed to spring out to it and back, like a tennis-ball on a piece of elastic. I sang hymns to the mantelpiece and prayed to it. It brooded there, a squat flat deity, giving off waves of evil power.

When next I became conscious, it was bright daylight. Lydia had brought my tea; it lay beside me steaming in the little terra-cotta Chinese pot. I felt glad and happy—I felt horribly sick and soiled. Then both feelings, and many more, were all submerged, as wave after wave of realization broke over me. I saw that nothing was changed, either in the world or in me.

A. J. AYER

ON THE ANALYSIS OF MORAL JUDGEMENTS

'MOST of us would agree', said F. P. Ramsey, addressing a society in Cambridge in 1925, 'that the objectivity of good was a thing we had settled and dismissed with the existence of God. Theology and Absolute Ethics are two famous subjects which we have realized to have no real objects.' There are many, however, who still think that these questions have not been settled; and in the meantime philosophers of Ramsay's persuasion have grown more circumspect. Theological and ethical statements are no longer stigmatized as false or meaningless. They are merely said to be different from scientific statements. They are differently related to their evidence; or rather, a different meaning is attached to 'evidence' in their case. 'Every kind of statement', we are told, 'has its own kind of logic.'

What this comes to, so far as moral philosophy is concerned, is that ethical statements are *sui generis*; and this may very well be true. Certainly, the view, which I still wish to hold, that what are called ethical statements are not really statements at all, that they are not descriptive of anything, that they cannot be either true or

false, is in an obvious sense incorrect. For, as the English language is currently used—and what else, it may be asked, is here in question?—it is by no means improper to refer to ethical utterances as statements; when someone characterizes an action by the use of an ethical predicate, it is quite good usage to say that he is thereby describing it; when someone wishes to assent to an ethical verdict, it is perfectly legitimate for him to say that it is true, or that it is a fact, just as, if he wished to dissent from it, it would be perfectly legitimate for him to say that it was false. We should know what he meant and we should not consider that he was using words in an unconventional way. What is unconventional, rather, is the usage of the philosopher who tells us that ethical statements are not really statements at all but something else, ejaculations perhaps or commands, and that they cannot be either true or false.

Now when a philosopher asserts that something 'really' is not what it really is, or 'really' is what it really is not, that we do not for example 'really' see chairs and tables, whereas there is a perfectly good and familiar sense in which we really do, or that we cannot 'really' step into the same river twice, whereas in fact we really can, it should not always be assumed that he is merely making a mistake. Very often what he is doing, although he may not know it, is to recommend a new way of speaking, not just for the amusement, but because he thinks that the old, the socially correct, way of speaking is logically misleading, or that his own proposal brings out certain points more clearly. Thus, in the present instance, it is no doubt correct to say that the moralist does make statements, and, what is more, statements of fact, statements of ethical fact. It is correct in the sense that if a vote were taken on the point, those who objected to this way of speaking would probably be in the minority. But when one considers how these ethical statements are actually used, it may be found that they function so very differently from other types of statement that it is advisable to put them into a separate category altogether; either to say that they are not to be counted as statements at all, or, if this proves inconvenient, at least to say that they do not express propositions, and consequently that there are no ethical facts. This does not mean that all ethical statements are held to be false. It is merely a matter of laying down a usage of the words 'proposition' and 'fact', according to which only

propositions express facts and ethical statements fall outside the class of propositions. This may seem to be an arbitrary procedure, but I hope to show that there are good reasons for adopting it. And once these reasons are admitted the purely verbal point is not of any great importance. If someone still wishes to say that ethical statements are statements of fact, only it is a queer sort of fact, he is welcome to do so. So long as he accepts my grounds for saying that they are not statements of fact, it is simply a question of how widely or loosely we want to use the word 'fact'. My own view is that it is preferable so to use it as to exclude ethical judgements, but it must not be inferred from this that I am treating them with disrespect. The only relevant consideration is that of clarity.

The distinctions that I wish to make can best be brought out by an example. Suppose that someone has committed a murder. Then part of the story consists of what we may call the police-court details; where and when and how the killing was effected; the identity of the murderer and of his victim; the relationship in which they stood to one another. Next there are the questions of motive: the murderer may have been suffering from jealousy, or he may have been anxious to obtain money; he may have been avenging a private injury, or pursuing some political end. These questions of motive are, on one level, a matter of the agent's reflections before the act; and these may very well take the form of moral judgements. Thus he may tell himself that his victim is a bad man and that the world would be better for his removal, or, in a different case, that it is his duty to rid his country of a tyrant, or, like Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, that he is a superior being who has in these circumstances the right to kill. A psychoanalyst who examines the case may however tell a different story. He may say that the political assassin is really revenging himself upon his father, or that the man who persuades himself that he is a social benefactor is really exhibiting a lust for power, or, in a case like that of Raskolnikov, that the murderer does not really believe that he has the right to kill.

All these are statements of fact; not indeed that the man has, or has not, the right to kill, but that this is what he tells himself. They are verified or confuted, as the case may be, by observation. It is a matter of fact, in my usage of the term, that the victim was killed at such and such a place and at such and such a time and in such and such a manner. It is also a matter of fact that the murderer had

certain conscious motives. To himself they are known primarily by introspection; to others by various features of his overt behaviour, including what he says. As regards his unconscious motives the only criterion is his overt behaviour. It can indeed plausibly be argued that to talk upon the unconscious is always equivalent to talking about overt behaviour, though often in a very complicated way. Now there seems to me to be a very good sense in which to tell a story of this kind, that this is what the man did and that these were his reasons for doing it, is to give a complete description of the facts. Or rather, since one can never be in a position to say that any such description is complete, what will be missing from it will be further information of the same type; what we obtain when this information is added is a more elaborate account of the circumstances of the action, and of its antecedents and consequences. But now suppose that instead of developing the story in this circumstantial way, one applies an ethical predicate to it. Suppose that instead of asking what it was that really happened, or what the agent's motives really were, we ask whether he was justified in acting as he did. Did he have the right to kill? Is it true that he had the right? Is it a fact that he acted rightly? It does not matter in this connexion what answer we give. The question for moral philosophy is not whether a certain action is right or wrong, but what is implied by saying that it is right, or saying that it is wrong. Suppose then that we say that the man acted rightly. The point that I wish to make is that in saying this we are not elaborating or modifying our description of the situation in the way that we should be elaborating it if we gave further police-court details, or in the way that we should be modifying it if we showed that the agent's motives were different from what they had been thought to be. To say that his motives were good, or that they were bad, is not to say what they were. To say that the man acted rightly, or that he acted wrongly, is not to say what he did. And when one has said what he did, when one has described the situation in the way that I have outlined, then to add that he was justified, or alternatively that he was not, is not to say any more about what he did; it does not add a further detail to the story. It is for this reason that these ethical predicates are not factual; they do not describe any feature of the situation to which they are applied. But they do, someone may object, they describe its ethical features. But what are these

ethical features? And how are they related to the other features of the situation, to what we may provisionally call its 'natural' features? Let us consider this.

To begin with, it is, or should be, clear that the connexion is not logical. Let us assume that two observers agree about all the circumstances of the case, including the agent's motives, but that they disagree in their evaluation of it. Then neither of them is contradicting himself. Otherwise the use of the ethical term would add nothing to the circumstantial description; it would serve merely as a repetition, or partial repetition, of it. But neither, as I hope to show, is the connexion factual. There is nothing that counts as observing the *designata* of the ethical predicates, apart from observing the natural features of the situation. But what alternative is left? Certainly it can be said that the ethical features in some way depend upon the natural. We can and do give reasons for our moral judgements, just as we do for our aesthetic judgements, where the same argument applies. We fasten on motives, point to consequences, ask what would happen if everyone were to behave in such a way, and so forth. But the question is: In what way do these reasons support the judgements? Not in a logical sense. Ethical argument is not formal demonstration. And not in a scientific sense either. For then the goodness or badness of the situation, the rightness or wrongness of the action, would have to be something apart from the situation, something independently verifiable, for which the facts adduced as the reasons for the moral judgement were evidence. But in these moral cases the two coincide. There is no procedure of examining the value of the facts, as distinct from examining the facts themselves. We may say that we have evidence for our moral judgements, but we cannot distinguish between pointing to the evidence itself and pointing to that for which it is supposed to be evidence. Which means that in the scientific sense it is not evidence at all.

My own answer to this question is that what are accounted reasons for our moral judgements are reasons only in the sense that they determine attitudes. One attempts to influence another person morally by calling his attention to certain natural features of the situation, which are such as will be likely to evoke from him the desired response. Or again one may give reasons to oneself as a means of settling on an attitude or, more importantly, as a means of coming to some practical decision. Of course there are

many cases in which one applies an ethical term without there being any question of one's having to act oneself, or even to persuade others to act, in any present situation. Moral judgements passed upon the behaviour of historical or fictitious characters provide obvious examples. But an action or a situation is morally evaluated always as an action or a situation of a certain kind. What is approved or disapproved is something repeatable. In saying that Brutus or Raskolnikov acted rightly, I am giving myself and others leave to imitate them should similar circumstances arise. I show myself to be favourably disposed in either case towards actions of that type. Similarly, in saying that they acted wrongly, I express a resolution not to imitate them, and endeavour also to discourage others. It may be thought that the mere use of the dyslogistic word 'wrongly' is not much of a discouragement, although it does have some emotive force. But that is where the reasons come in. I discourage others, or at any rate hope to discourage them, by telling them why I think the action wrong; and here the argument may take various forms. One method is to appeal to some moral principle, as, for example, that human life is sacred, and show that it applies to the given case. It is assumed that the principle is one that already has some influence upon those to whom the argument is addressed. Alternatively, one may try to establish certain further facts, as, for example, that the act in question caused, or was such as would be likely to cause, a great deal of unhappiness; and here it is assumed that the consideration of these facts will modify the hearer's attitude. It is assumed that he regards the increase of human misery as something undesirable, something if possible to be avoided. As for the moral judgement itself, it may be regarded as expressing the attitude which the reasons given for it are calculated to evoke. To say, as I once did, that these moral judgements are merely expressive of certain feelings, feelings of approval or disapproval, is an over-simplification. The fact is rather that what may be described as moral attitudes consist in certain patterns of behaviour, and that the expression of a moral judgement is an element in the pattern. The moral judgement expresses the attitude in the sense that it contributes to defining it. Why people respond favourably to certain facts and unfavourably to others is a question for the sociologist, into which I do not here propose to enter. I should imagine that the utilitarians had gone some way towards

answering this question, although theirs is almost certainly not the whole answer. But my concern at present is only to analyse the use of ethical terms, not scientifically to explain it.

At this point it may be objected that I have been excessively dogmatic. What about the people who claim that they do observe ethical properties, non-natural properties, as G. E. Moore once put it, not indeed through their senses, but by means of intellectual intuition? What of those who claim that they have a moral sense, and mean by this not merely that they have feelings of approval and disapproval, or whatever else may go to define a moral attitude, but that they experience such things as goodness or beauty in a way somehow analogous to that in which they experience sounds or colours? What are we to say to them? I may not have any experiences of this sort myself, but that, it may be said, is just my shortcoming. I am surely not entitled to assume that all these honest and intelligent persons do not have the experiences that they say they do. It may be, indeed, that the differences between us lie not so much in the nature of our respective experiences as in our fashion of describing them. I do in fact suspect that the experiences which some philosophers want to describe as intuitions, or as quasi-sensory apprehensions, of good are not significantly different from those that I want to describe as feelings of approval. But whether this be so or not, it does not in any way affect my argument. For let it be granted that someone who contemplates some natural situation detects in it something which he describes as 'goodness' or 'beauty' or 'fittingness' or 'worthiness to be approved'. How this experience of goodness, or whatever it may be, is supposed to be related to the experiences which reveal the natural features of the situation has not yet been made clear, but I take it that it is not regarded merely as their effect. Rather, the situation is supposed to look good, or fitting, in much the same way as a face may be said to look friendly. But then to say that this experience is an experience of good will be to say no more than that it is this type of experience. The word 'good', or whatever other value term may be used, simply comes to be descriptive of experience of this type, and here it makes no difference whether they are regarded as intuitions or as moral sensations. In neither case does anything whatsoever follow as regards conduct. That a situation has this peculiar property, the property whose presence is established by people's

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having such experiences, does not entail that it is preferable to other situations, or that it is anyone's duty to bring it into existence. To say that such a situation ought to be created, or that it deserves to exist, will be to say something different from merely saying that it has this property. This point is obscured by the use of an ethical term to describe the property, just because the ethical term is tacitly understood to be normative. It continues to fulfil its function of prescribing the attitude that people are to take. But if the ethical term is understood to be normative, then it does not merely describe the alleged non-natural property, and if it does merely describe this property, then it is not normative and so no longer does the work that ethical terms are supposed to do.

This argument may become clearer if, instead of designating the supposed property from the outset as 'good', we refer to it simply as 'X'. The question then arises whether X is identical with good. How is this question to be interpreted? If it is interpreted as merely asking whether X is of a certain quality, whether it exhibits the character for which the word 'good' is being made to stand, then the answer may very well be that the two are identical; but all that this amounts to is that we have decided to use the word 'good' to designate what is also designated by X. And from this no normative conclusion follows. It does not follow that the situation characterized by X has any value, if its having value is understood as implying not merely that it answers to a certain description but that it has some claim upon us, that it is something that we ought to foster or desire. Having appropriated the word 'good' to do duty for X, to serve as a mere description of a special tone or colouring of the situation, we shall need some other word to do the normative work that the word 'good' did before. But if 'good' is allowed to keep its normative sense, then goodness may indeed be attributed to X, but the two cannot be identified. For then to say that X is good is not just to say that X stands for a certain property. It is to say that whatever has this property is to be valued, sought, approved of, brought into existence in preference to other things, and so on. Those who talk of non-natural qualities, moral intuitions, and all the rest of it, may be giving peculiar descriptions of commonplace experiences, or they may be giving suggestive descriptions of peculiar experiences; it does not matter which view we take. In either case we are left with the further question whether what is so described

is to be valued; and this is not simply equivalent to asking what character it has, whether natural, or non-natural, whatever that may mean. Thus even if an intuitionist does have experiences that others do not have, it makes no difference to the argument. We are still entitled to say that it is misleading for him to use a value-term to designate the content of such experiences; for in this way he contrives to smuggle a normative judgement into what purports to be a statement of fact. A valuation is not a description of something very peculiar; it is not a description at all. Consequently, the familiar subjective-objective antithesis is out of place in moral philosophy. The problem is not that the subjectivist denies that certain wild, or domesticated, animals, 'objective values', exist and the objectivist triumphantly produces them; or that the objectivist returns like an explorer with tales from the kingdom of values and the subjectivist says he is a liar. It does not matter what the explorer finds or does not find. For talking about values is not a matter of describing what may or may not be there, the problem being whether it really is there. There is no such problem. The moral problem is: What am I to do? What attitude am I to take? And moral judgements are directives in this sense.

We can now see that the whole dispute about the objectivity of values, as it is ordinarily conducted, is pointless and idle. I suppose that what underlies it is the question: Are the things that I value really valuable, and how can I know that they are? Then one party gives the answer: They are really valuable if they reflect, or participate in, or are in some other mysterious way related to an objective world of values; and you can know that they are by inspecting this world. To which their opponents reply that there is no such world, and can therefore be no such inspection. But this sort of argument, setting aside the question whether it is even intelligible, is nothing to the purpose. For suppose that someone did succeed in carrying out such an inspection. Suppose that he had an experience which we allowed him to describe in these terms. He can still raise the questions: Are these values the real ones? Are the objects that I am inspecting themselves really valuable, and how can I know that they are? And how are these questions to be answered? They do not arise, it may be said. These objective values carry the stamp of authenticity upon their faces. You have only to look at them to know that they are genuine. But, in this sense, any natural situation to which we

attach value can carry the stamp of authenticity upon its face. That is to say, the value which is attached to it may be something that it does not occur to us to question. But in neither case is it inconceivable that the value should be questioned. Thus, these alleged objective values perform no function. The hypothesis of their existence does no work; or rather, it does no work that is not equally well done without it. Its effect is to answer the question: Are the things that I value really valuable? by Yes, if you have a certain sort of experience in connexion with them. Let us assume that these experiences can be identified and even that there is some method for deciding between them when they appear to yield contradictory results. Even so, that someone does or does not have them is itself a 'natural' fact. Moreover, this answer merely lays down one of many possible standards. It is on a par with saying the things that you value are really valuable if they increase human happiness, or they are really valuable if certain persons, your pastors and masters, approve of them. Then either one accepts the standard, or one raises the question again. Why should I value human happiness? Why should I be swayed by my pastors and masters? Why should I attach such great importance just to these experiences? In the end there must come a point where one gets no further answer, but only a repetition of the injunction: Value this because it is valuable.

In conducting this argument, I have put the most favourable interpretation upon my opponents' claims; for I have assumed that what is described as the apprehension of objective values may be a different experience from the everyday experience of attaching value to some natural situation; but, in fact, I am fairly confident that what we have here are two different ways of describing the same experience. And in that case the answer that the 'objectivists' give to the question: Are the things that I value really valuable? is the 'subjective' answer that they are really valuable if you value them, or perhaps that they are really valuable if certain other people value them. What we are given is an injunction not to worry, which may or may not satisfy us. If it does not, perhaps something else will. But in any case there is nothing to be done about it, except look at the facts, look at them harder, look at more of them, and then come to a moral decision. Then asking whether the attitude that one has adopted is the right attitude comes down to asking whether one is prepared to stand by it.

There can be no guarantee of its correctness, because nothing counts as a guarantee. Or rather, something may count for someone as a guarantee, but counting something as a guarantee is itself taking up a moral standpoint.

All this applies equally to 'naturalistic' theories of ethics, like Utilitarianism. By defining 'right', in the way that Bentham does, as 'conducive to the greatest happiness of the greatest number', one does give it a descriptive meaning; but just for that reason one takes it out of the list of ethical terms. So long as the word 'right' keeps its current emotive force, the implication remains that what is right ought to be done, but this by no means follows from Bentham's definition. Nevertheless, it is clearly intended that the definition should somehow carry this implication; otherwise it would not fulfil its purpose. For the point of such a definition, as Professor Stevenson has well brought out in his *Ethics and Language*, is not that it gives precision to the use of a word, but that it covertly lays down a standard of conduct. The moral judgement is that happiness is to be maximized, and that actions are to be evaluated, praised or blamed, imitated or avoided, in proportion as they militate for or against this end. Now this is not a statement of fact, but a recommendation; and in the ordinary way the sense of such a recommendation is contained in some ethical term. These ethical terms can also be given a descriptive meaning, but it is not *qua* descriptive that they are ethical. If, for example, the word 'wrong' is simply equated with 'not conducive to human happiness', some other term will be needed to carry the normative implication that conduct of this sort is to be avoided; and it is terms of this kind, which are not descriptive, that I am treating as distinctively ethical.

I hope that I have gone some way towards making clear what the theory which I am advocating is. Let me now say what it is not. In the first place, I am not saying that morals are trivial or unimportant, or that people ought not to bother with them. For this would itself be a judgement of value, which I have not made and do not wish to make. And even if I did wish to make it it would have no logical connexion with my theory. For the theory is entirely on the level of analysis; it is an attempt to show what people are doing when they make moral judgements; it is not a set of suggestions as to what moral judgements they are to make. And this is true of all moral philosophy, as I understand it.

All moral theories, intuitionist, naturalistic, objectivist, emotive, and the rest, in so far as they are philosophical theories, are neutral as regards actual conduct. To speak technically, they belong to the field of meta-ethics, not ethics proper. That is why it is silly, as well as presumptuous, for any one type of philosopher to pose as the champion of virtue. And it is also one reason why many people find moral philosophy an unsatisfying subject. For they mistakenly look to the moral philosopher for guidance.

Again, when I say that moral judgements are emotive rather than descriptive, that they are persuasive expressions of attitudes and not statements of fact, and consequently that they cannot be either true or false, or at least that it would make for clarity if the categories of truth and falsehood were not applied to them, I am not saying that nothing is good or bad, right or wrong, or that it does not matter what we do. For once more such a statement would itself be the expression of a moral attitude. This attitude is not entailed by the theory, nor do I in fact adopt it. It would indeed be a difficult position to maintain. It would exclude even egotism as a policy, for the decision to consult nothing but one's own pleasure is itself a value judgement. What it requires is that one should live without any policy at all. This may or may not be feasible. My point is simply that I am not recommending it. Neither, in expounding my meta-ethical theory, am I recommending the opposite. It is indeed to be expected that a moral philosopher, even in my sense of the term, will have his moral standards and that he will sometimes make moral judgements; but these moral judgements cannot be a logical consequence of his philosophy. To analyse moral judgements is not itself to moralize.

Finally, I am not saying that anything that anybody thinks right is right; that putting people into concentration camps is preferable to allowing them free speech if somebody happens to think so, and that the contrary is also preferable if somebody thinks that it is. If my theory did entail this, it would be contradictory; for two different courses of action cannot each be preferable to the other. But it does not entail anything of the sort. On my analysis, to say that something which somebody thinks right is to range oneself on his side, to adhere to that particular standpoint, and certainly I do not adhere to every standpoint whatsoever. I adhere to some, and not to others, like everybody else who has any moral views at

all. It is, indeed, true that in a case where one person A approves of X, and another person B approves of not-X, A may correctly express his attitude towards X by saying that it is good, or right, and that B may correctly use the same term to express his attitude towards not-X. But there is no contradiction here. There would be a contradiction if from the fact that A was using words honestly and correctly when he said that X was good, and that B was using words honestly and correctly when he said that not-X was good, it followed that both X and not-X were good, or that X was both good and bad. But this does not follow, inasmuch as the conclusion that X is good, or that not-X is good, itself expresses the attitude of a third party, the speaker, who is by no means bound to agree with both A and B. In this example, indeed, he cannot consistently agree with both, though he may disagree with both if he regards both X and not-X as ethically neutral, or as contraries rather than contradictories in respect of value. This is perhaps rather a subtle point, but it is essential for the understanding of my position. To say that anything is right if someone thinks so is unobjectionable if it means no more than that anyone is entitled to use the word 'right' to refer to something of which he morally approves. But this is not the way in which it is ordinarily taken. It is ordinarily taken as the enunciation of a moral principle. As a moral principle it does appear contradictory; it is at least doubtful whether to say of a man that he commits himself morally both to X and not-X is to describe a possible attitude. But it may perhaps be construed as a principle of universal moral tolerance. As such, it may appeal to some; it does not, in fact, to me. But the important point is that it is not entailed by the theory, which is neutral as regards all moral principles. And here I may repeat that in saying that it is neutral as regards all moral principles I am not saying that it recommends them all alike, nor that it condemns them all alike. It is not that sort of theory. No philosophical theory is.

But even if there is no logical connexion between this meta-ethical theory and any particular type of conduct, may there not be a psychological connexion? Does not the promulgation of such a theory encourage moral laxity? Has not its effect been to destroy people's confidence in accepted moral standards? And will not the result of this be that something mischievous will take their place? Such charges have, indeed, been made, but I do not

know upon what evidence. The question how people's conduct is actually affected by their acceptance of a meta-ethical theory is one for empirical investigation; and in this case, so far as I know, no serious investigation has yet been carried out. My own observations, for what they are worth, do not suggest that those who accept the 'positivist' analysis of moral judgements conduct themselves very differently as a class from those who reject it; and, indeed, I doubt if the study of moral philosophy does, in general, have any very marked effect upon people's conduct. The way to test the point would be to convert a sufficiently large number of people from one meta-ethical view to another and make careful observations of their behaviour before and after their conversions. Assuming that their behaviour changed in some significant way, it would then have to be decided by further experiment whether this was due to the change in their philosophical beliefs or to some other factor. If it could be shown, as I believe it could not, that the general acceptance of the sort of analysis of moral judgements that I have been putting forward would have unhappy social consequences, the conclusion drawn by illiberal persons might be that the doctrine ought to be kept secret. For my part I think that I should dispute this conclusion on moral grounds, but this is a question which I am not now concerned to argue. What I have tried to show is not that my theory is expedient, but that it is true.

PIERRE MABILLE

MATTA AND THE NEW REALITY

MATTA should be considered as a realist painter; his paintings are very precise and accurate objective renderings of contemporary reality. Such a statement, obvious enough to myself and a few others, needs some qualifying remarks not to appear a paradoxical joke. I am not thinking of the general public which is always fifty years behind the times and is only now becoming familiar with impressionism. I am appealing to those restless, inquisitive, and observant minds who read the art magazines, go to exhibitions

and wish to understand, but who find it very difficult, confused by opposing theories, to distinguish between the contradictory tendencies of contemporary painting and are unable, in the present chaos, to discriminate between the imitators, the talented artisans, and the real innovators.

The discussion about social realism, embittered by political tactics and personal feuds, and the quarrels between 'figuratives' and 'non-figuratives', have particularly helped to obscure a situation which was already confused in the so-called period between the two wars.

The repetition of basic truths is always a matter for some scruple, but reading critical articles invariably brings one back to it.

It is obvious enough that painters are artisans who create forms. They make objects satisfying the aesthetic sense through the style of a line, the fluidity of a tone, the unusualness of a colour relationship, or the balance of a composition. The talent for making pictures lies in the possibility of graphically expressing an emotion, and it communicates itself by the establishment of a technique and personal style. From this point of view, the subject of a painting is of no importance, it is only the pretext for successful or unsuccessful juxtaposition of lines or colours.

In all periods, remarkable individual temperaments have been satisfied to create pleasing, moving, or beautiful images without anguish or metaphysical anxiety, but since the end of the last century, we no longer demand a painter to be a gifted artisan, but to be a restless artist, a poet who reconstructs the universe for us, a seer who makes use of his expressive gift to present us with the unrevealed aspects of reality. We want him to make himself, if not a poet, at least clairvoyant, to render objective those forms which we have difficulty in seeing, or those of which we only catch an occasional glimpse; in other words, that he should help us to establish a new conception of the world.

It is surely true that what we insist on with such impatience today, because we are painfully aware of the inadequacy of our traditional representation of reality, has always been the function of the genuine artist. Art is indissolubly linked to discovery. Technical research is itself not so independent as is generally believed from the desire to explore the unknown.

Permanent exterior reality does of course exist. It is the philosopher's concern to discuss and define it in the abstract. What is

important to man is the image he makes of this reality. By experiment, modern psychology has proved that we only see what we are accustomed to see and what suits our ideas and beliefs . . . We build our representation of things on a system which itself reflects our emotional state, our opinions, interests, and social necessities. Experimental science fully confirms the sayings of the Buddhist philosophers who, for more than twenty-five centuries, have repeated that reality is only the habit we have made of reality.

The fifteenth-century peasant, on his way home from tilling the fields, used to see angels and devils whose appearance had been established for him by the cathedral sculptures, chapel paintings, and the descriptions of his priests. At the crossroads, the animistic negro still meets the earth, wind, and forest spirits, as invoked for him by his religion. He is not dreaming, he is seeing them . . . just as eighteenth-century man suddenly saw landscapes and waterfalls because the poets had sung of them to him . . . and as our parents, fifty years ago, used to see cathedrals in the mist, the reflection of the sun on water, the decomposition of light on the leaves or on a woman's cheek, because the impressionist painters had revealed these things to them.

Throughout history, parallel lines have appeared to meet in infinity towards that well-known vanishing-point which we project ahead of us when we observe the horizon and yet we have only become conscious of perspective since Uccello established it as a law for painters. Moreover, for this idea of perspective to interpret the social hierarchy and the new form of a centralized society, liberated from feudal pluralism, as historical materialism would have us believe, there is the possibility that the painter's representation of it has nevertheless been essential for it to become perceptible to the masses.

The crisis in modern painting interprets the profound revolution which is operating within humanity. The different tendencies in the ascendant correspond to the multiple currents which are already in opposition to each other or already established. The work of Picasso, ceaselessly oscillating between the nostalgia for traditional forms (Greek period) and the determination to destroy the accepted appearance of objects so as to present them under all their aspects, in order to render visual their most complete reality, is conclusive enough. Elsewhere I have shown how Picasso, the most gifted of the western painters, had predicted, from the negro

period onwards, the failure of the western world and the impossibility of its survival without extensive borrowings from the so-called primitive coloured peoples.

No one can seriously dispute the fact that there is a new reality today even if this reality exists only by virtue of the exploration of hitherto unknown spheres. I am referring to submarine landscapes, clouds flown over, the close acquaintance with tissues observed under the microscope and spectrographic images revealing the constitution of matter. In our time, the accepted appearance of objects only expresses an average vision, a small section of an extended spectrum, one dimension amongst many others which are just as moving, just as real, certainly more moving because of their novelty and more real because better adapted to the effective forces.

There is a curious coincidence here. During that period when these undisclosed aspects of exterior reality were being discovered by means of powerful instruments, surrealism, exploring the unconscious interior reality and freeing the painter's hand from all technical and aesthetic constraints which up to that time had enslaved him, gave rise to very similar images.

Landscapes are not the only things to be transformed; the intellectual system and social relationships have experienced a profound revolution; our vision must therefore be modified. But what are the aspects of this modern life? I ask what are they and not what would we like them to be, for the great majority of people, when considering this question, think of what is no longer in existence or of what they desire without concerning themselves with what really does exist. The contemporary world has become a compact thing. The halo which used to isolate the man of the last century, giving a unity to his personality, has disappeared. The rooms we live in, the specialization of the social functions, the promiscuity of urban existence, and the incessant intrusion of collective life into the very centre of our personal retreats, turn us into bodily organs linked together within the tangle of collective organizations. At first, on the affective level, we have experienced these collective organizations as agencies of pain but now, becoming more familiar with them, we are able to distinguish some of their aspects. Naturally there is no possibility of examining from the outside these entities in which we ourselves are included; our fragmentary impressions are similar to those

which our cell-tissues might have of the architecture of our whole body.

In this new world, there is no possibility of defining the limits of the human being or of the object. Not because these limits are vague and drowned in an impressionist mist; on the contrary, the surfaces are clear, the design is sharp, but the facets are so numerous, so intricate and so mobile that no boundaries can be assigned with any certainty. Human beings and objects resemble the wheels of an infinitely complex machine, turning at a crazy speed. Even an approximately true representation of them must evoke the simultaneity of contrary or synchronous movements, occurring everywhere at the same time. Thus the outlines and divisions become semi-transparent partitions, artificial separations traversed by an infinity of gears and conductor wires.

Marcel Duchamps in 'La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires eux-mêmes' gave us the first valid image, precise yet impalpable, of this complexity, an image dominated by strict mathematical discipline as well as by complete fantasy. Whereas Picasso has served as a model for hundreds of copyists who are obstructing painting today, Duchamps's discovery, doubtless on account of its extreme difficulty, has only been a revelation to a very small number of our contemporaries amongst whom are G. Onslow Ford, Esteban Frances and, more obviously, Matta.

In proportion as the new world becomes more compact, as its contours lose their former solidity, as the unities collapse and become confused, as the suns are replaced by the reflection from spectra and by the glow from nuclear fires, the human being feels himself more solitary, more unable to communicate and more shut in by the private vision of his own frenzied adventure. The strangeness of a cloud-bank, transfixed only by a mountain-peak streaming with lightning-flashes, viewed from the cabin of an aeroplane, means absolutely nothing to the clerk entirely absorbed in the mysterious handing-on of business papers through the ant-hill of his office.

The adventure of modern life has all the characteristics of a schizophrenic progression during which the ties are broken between the human being and the exterior world. Nostalgia-ridden conservatives complain of the inhumanity of the present and long for everything to be reduced once more to the scale of our desires and understanding. Who would not join them in their wish? In

spite of sighs and regrets, the adventure continues at quite a different rhythm to that of our hearts, with the aid of infinitely powerful instruments which have evaded human control and act like autonomous monsters, enslaving their creators.

During his first period of research, Matta was fascinated by cosmic chaos, by the consideration of space to the n^{th} dimension, illuminated by explosions and the glowing colours of jewels. Later, he established a more direct contact with the new reality, now his chosen sphere of evolution. All our friends have been preoccupied by the need to surpass the traditional three dimensions but they have run into the difficulty of integrating a co-ordinated fourth dimension. Matta discovered a neat solution for this by reducing space to a moment in time; space is no longer an expanse but a richness of potential energy.

Classical determinism made a thorough study of the action of the more easily calculable and ascertainable forces. Matta opposes this conception with the convulsive determinism of sudden crystallizations, earthquakes, storms, and turns of fortune. Even if the whole of reality cannot be apprehended in its complexity by the method of controlled surrealist automatism, it is possible to draw the horoscope of the moment. Matta makes use of the brief glow of a lightning-flash in order to pierce the opacity of the divisions between things and to see through and across the void or the solid which are doubtless of the same nature. The entities which he incorporates in his constantly changing personal mythology make their appearance during these flashes. In all his paintings, we have both the sensation of being at the centre of a world and of dominating it from a very high altitude. It is not the sight of the sun which provides the illumination but the fluorescence of blood turned red by the exigency of desire. This desire of which man is the instrument is no less cosmic than the traditional sun; it is a replica of it, the black star with its own speed of rotation in the arterial conduits, in the depths of mines, in the wake of fires; it has its own geometry which is no less strict than that of Newton, a geometry which psycho-analysis allows him to evolve.

For Matta the moment of inspiration results from the shock of two words which combine together and produce an explosion. Finding the landmarks which allow him to pursue his lightning way in this 'catastrophe' of the interior sky in which words are the constellations, Matta follows, in this respect, the strict tradition

of poetic delirium. His powerful vitality, unbelievable optimism and astonishing resurgences of youth are essential to him for such an escapade to be possible without leading to a sacrificial and painful renunciation.

[*Translated by* PETER WATSON]

RYUNOSUKE AKUTAGAWA

SAN SEBASTIAN

INTRODUCTION

THE Japanese writer Ryunosuke Akutagawa was born in 1892. He began publishing stories in 1914 and from then until his premature death in 1927 he poured out a mass of stories, essays, translations and reviews.

He became fascinated by the 'Christian period' in Japan when (late in the sixteenth century) converts numbered nearly two hundred thousand, and above all, by the legends that cluster round the few stubborn converts who after the suppression of Christianity early in the seventeenth century hid in the mountains of Southern Japan, secretly practising their religion at imminent peril of denunciation.

Among Akutagawa's most original and forcible works are a few pieces that he wrote in scenario form, using it, however, simply as a literary form, with no thought of having films made. It is one of these scenarios that you are going to read, and it deals with the story of a Japanese peasant who after his conversion by Catholic missionaries was called 'Padre Sebastian' and sometimes 'San Sebastian', though he was never of course officially canonized. The story takes place in 1634, some time after the proscription of Christianity, when Sebastian was hiding in a mountain-cave which he had converted into an oratory.

The scenario is broadly speaking an allegory of the struggle between the spiritual and the material, or, as Akutagawa puts it in his note-books, between 'religion and politics'. I will not attempt to analyse all his symbols; the work lives sufficiently by the direct impact that it makes on the visual imagination. But in order to understand the role played by the Dutch sea-captain one

must know that the Catholics believed the Dutch to have been largely responsible for the suppression of Catholicism by the Japanese Government. It is certain at any rate that the Dutch gained by this suppression, for after the disappearance of the Spaniards and Portuguese, trade with Japan became a Dutch monopoly.

The scenario deals with the future as well as the past. Shot 38 reads like a prophecy of Hiroshima.

ARTHUR WALEY

SHOT

A SCENARIO

- 1 A track in the mountains of southern Japan. The spreading branches of a tall Camphor Tree, and beyond it, the mouth of a cave. Presently two wood-cutters come down the track. One of them points to the cave and says something to the other. Then both of them make the sign of the Cross, bowing as they do so towards the mouth of the cave.
- 2 The branches of the Camphor Tree. On one branch sits a monkey with a long tail, gazing out over the distant sea. A sailing-ship appears. It is coming nearer and nearer.
- 3 Close-up of the sailing-ship running before the wind.
- 4 On board the ship. Two Dutch sailors are sitting at the foot of the mast, playing dice. They seem to be quarrelling about the score; suddenly one of them flies into a rage, springs forward and plunges a knife into the other's heart.
- 5 The head of the murdered sailor, face upward. Suddenly a long-tailed monkey crawls out of one of his nostrils and squats on his chin. It takes a good look round and then, as though satisfied with what it has seen, crawls back again into the dead sailor's nostril.
- 6 An expanse of sea, seen obliquely from above. Suddenly the body of the murdered man falls through space and, as it meets the water, disappears into the spray it has raised. At the spot where it vanished a monkey is seen floundering in the waves.
- 7 The sea, with a headland coming into sight.
- 8 The Camphor Tree. The monkey is still sitting on one of the branches, gazing eagerly at a sailing ship out at sea. Presently

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it throws up its arms with a gesture of triumph, and an expression of intense delight comes into its face. A second monkey now swings itself down from the top of the tree and squats on the same branch. The two monkeys gesticulate, and seem to be carrying on some sort of conversation. After a while the second monkey curls its tail round the branch and swings itself down to the foot of the tree. As it does so, it shades its eyes with one paw, peering into the branches and into the thick leafage beyond.

- 9 Outside the mouth of the cave. A dense tangle of banana-trees and bamboos. No other sign of life. It is growing darker and darker. Presently a bat comes out of the mouth of the cave and flops slowly up into the sky.
- 10 Inside the cave. Sebastian, all alone, kneels at prayer in front of a Cross that hangs on the rock wall. He wears a black cassock. He is a Japanese, and might be forty or a little less. A solitary candle casts its light on a table and water-jug.
- 11 Part of the rock wall, with the light of the candle falling upon it. The shadow of Sebastian's face is sharply profiled on the wall. But another shadow, that of a long-tailed monkey, is climbing up the nape of his neck and quietly ensconces itself on the top of his head. A second monkey follows suit.
- 12 Sebastian's hands, joined in prayer. They seem now to be holding something. It is a Dutch tobacco-pipe. At first it does not seem to be alight, but presently curls of smoke begin to rise from it.
- 13 Inside the cave. Sebastian scrambles to his feet and flings the pipe on to the rocky floor of the cave. As it lies there, smoke continues to rise from it just as before. He looks bewildered, but makes no further attempt to do anything about it.
- 14 The pipe lying on the ground. Gradually it changes into a round flask, full of wine. Another change, and it is a sugared Castile bun. But soon it becomes less and less like anything to eat and in the end is a diminutive geisha, swinging very graceful legs and looking up sideways, as though into someone's face. . . .

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- 15 Half-length of Sebastian. He makes the sign of the Cross; after which he wears an expression of intense relief.
- 16 Two long-tailed monkeys squatting under a candle. Both of them look very cross.
- 17 Sebastian in his cave, praying once more at the foot of the Cross. Presently a huge owl flops down, making a great rush of air that puts out the candle; but a single moon-beam still casts a dim light on the Cross.
- 18 The Cross, hanging against the rock-wall. It turns into the lattice of an oblong window. Through the window one sees a thatched cottage. Just a cottage; there are no people anywhere about. Gradually the cottage moves up nearer to the window.
- 19 Now one can see into the cottage. In it there is an old woman who is very like Sebastian. With one hand she turns a spinning wheel, while in the other she holds a branch laden with cherries, dangling it in front of a child two or three years old. The child too very like Sebastian and one would certainly take it for his. But soon the inside of the cottage, grandmother and child along with it, drift away like a mist through the oblong window, and now one sees straight through to the field at the back of the cottage. A woman who looks near to forty is busily cutting the corn.
- 20 Half-figure of Sebastian, staring through the oblong window. Only the view through the window is lighted. The field has vanished. Instead the whole space is filled by heads—innumerable heads of men and women, young and old, continually moving this way and that. Above the heads rise crosses on which three figures are crucified, their arms spread high above the crowd. The figure on the middle cross is unmistakably that of Sebastian. He starts back from the oblong window, and suddenly falls to the ground.
- 21 Inside the cave. Sebastian, prostrate on the floor. Suddenly he lifts his head and looks up at the Cross, on which moonlight is falling. As he looks, the Cross changes gradually into a primitive carving of the Nativity of Buddha. Sebastian gazes in astonishment at the Infant; then rises to his feet and crosses

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- himself. The shadow of a huge owl sweeps across the track of the moonlight. The Buddha turns back once more into a Cross.
- 22 The mountain track under moonlight. A black table appears, with a pack of cards lying on it. Two hands stretch towards the table and cut the pack; then they deal quietly and deliberately, to left and right.
- 23 Inside the cave. Sebastian is walking up and down, with bowed head. Suddenly a halo appears, suspended just above his head, lighting up the whole cave. Sebastian halts abruptly and stands stock still in the middle of the cave. At first he wears a startled expression; but this changes gradually into one of delight. He flings himself at the foot of the Cross and prays intently.
- 24 Sebastian's right ear. Out of the lobe grows a tree, heavily laden with clusters of round fruit. The ear-hole is a meadow with bright flowers growing among the grass. The grass is stirred by a gentle breeze.
- 25 Inside the cave; but this time looking towards the entrance. Sebastian, wearing his halo, rises from beneath the Cross and walks quietly towards the mouth of the cave. As soon as he is out of sight, the Cross crashes to the ground, and at the same moment a monkey leaps out of the water-jug and begins to creep cautiously towards the Cross. Soon a second monkey follows suit.
- 26 Outside the cave. Sebastian, walking in the moonlight, comes slowly forward. His shadow falls to the left; but that is not the only shadow. There is another that falls to the right. It has the form of a figure wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a long cloak. Sebastian comes towards us till his half-figure blocks the whole mouth of the cave. He halts for a moment and looks up into the sky.
- 27 The sky, glittering with stars. Suddenly a huge pair of compasses strides down through space. As they near the ground the two giant legs draw together; but just when they seem about to fold into one, a mist covers them and they disappear.

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- 28 Countless suns suspended in a wide expanse of darkness. Round them countless terrestrial globes are spinning.
- 29 The mountain track. Sebastian, with halo and two shadows, comes slowly down the hill. At the foot of the Camphor Tree he halts and stares fixedly at the ground.
- 30 The mountain track, seen from above. Down it rolls a stone. Soon the stone turns into a Neolithic axe, then into a dagger, and finally into a pistol. But is it a pistol? It no longer looks very much like one. In fact, it has changed back into being just an ordinary piece of stone.
- 31 The trunk of the Camphor Tree rises into view, standing in full moonlight. At first it is just a tree-trunk, encased in rough bark. But gradually masks begin to appear—the faces of all the Powers that rule the world; each one standing out separate and clear. Last of all comes the face of Jesus Crucified. But is it going to be the last? No, not the last, for while one looks it changes slowly into the folded front page of the *Tokyo Daily Gazette*.
- 32 The mountain-track. The shadow of the figure in the cloak and wide-brimmed hat mounts the path, all on its own. As it nears the brow of the hill it ceases to be merely a shadow and turns into a Dutch sea-captain, with goatee-beard and hard, piercing eyes.
- 33 A headland, with sea below. Sebastian and the Dutchman in earnest conversation. The Dutchman takes a telescope from under his cloak and hands it to him. Sebastian hesitates for a moment, but finally puts it to his eye and looks out to sea. A strong wind is blowing. It shakes the grass and trees; Sebastian's cassock continually bellies and flaps; but the Dutchman's cloak never moves.
- 34 First view through the telescope. A room hung with many pictures. A Dutch man and woman are sitting at a table, talking. On the candle-lit table are wine-cups, a guitar, some roses in a vase. Another Dutchman suddenly bursts into the room, sword in hand. The first Dutchman starts to his feet, draws his sword and makes as though to parry the other's blow. But

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it is too late; the sword has pierced his heart and he falls to the ground. The woman, who has fled to the far corner of the room, gazes in horror at the scene, clutching her head in her hands.

- 35 Second view through the telescope. A room with book-cases and heavy furniture. A Dutchman is sitting vacantly at a table. It is lit by an electric lamp and on it lie books, ledgers, magazines. A Dutch child comes merrily bursting in at the door. The man takes it into his lap, kisses it again and again and then makes a gesture as though to say, 'Now run away!' The child goes straight to the door. The man turns again to the table and seems to be taking something out of a drawer. Instantly his head becomes enveloped in heavy curls of smoke.
- 36 Third view through the telescope. A Dutch girl typewriting in a room in which there is a half-length portrait of a certain Russian leader. Presently an older Dutch woman quietly opens the door and hands the girl a letter. She holds the letter close under the lamp and begins to read. She has hardly read a line when she is seized with violent hysteria. The older woman, gaping with astonishment, retreats towards the door.
- 37 Fourth view through the telescope. Interior of a room. It looks like an Expressionist picture. A Dutch man and woman are seated at a table, talking. On the table, which is lit up by an unnatural and unaccountable radiance, lie a test-tube, a funnel, bellows and other scientific implements. The door of the room opens stealthily and with a mysterious air a huge puppet-Dutchman, far taller than the man and woman at the table, comes in carrying a bunch of artificial flowers. The puppet makes as though to hand them the bouquet, but something seems to go wrong with its mechanism. It rushes at the seated Dutchman and flings him to the ground. The woman flees to the far corner of the room, clutches her head in her hands and bursts into peal after peal of uncontrollable laughter.
- 38 Fifth view through the telescope. The same room, empty. There is a violent explosion and the whole room goes up in terrific clouds of smoke. For a moment, after the smoke clears, a vast, burnt-out prairie stretches into the distance. But soon

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this changes into fields of tall grass, with a solitary willow-tree growing beside a stream. From the tall grass a flock of countless white herons soars up into the sky.

- 39 The headland as before. Sebastian, telescope in hand, is saying something to the sea-captain. The captain shakes his head, takes a star from the sky and shows it to Sebastian. Sebastian, trembling from head to foot, struggles frantically to make the sign of the Cross; but this time he seems utterly unable to do so. The sea-captain lays the star on the palm of his hand and holds it towards Sebastian, as though wanting him to look at it.
- 40 The palm of the sea-captain's hand, with the star lying on it. Gradually the star changes into a pebble, the pebble changes into a potato and the potato into a butterfly. Finally, the butterfly is transformed into a diminutive Napoleon, in cocked-hat and uniform.
- 41 The mountain track. The sea-captain approaches, followed by Sebastian who ambles after him with a very dejected air. The captain stops and, turning round, removes Sebastian's halo, much as one detaches an iron hoop from a tub. The halo, lying across the path, gradually changes into a large pocket-watch. The time is 2.30.
- 42 Undulating country, not far from the track, seen from high above. The whole scene is bathed in moonlight, which soon changes into electric light, and one is looking down into a densely crowded modern *café dansant*. At the far end, a forest of saxophones and violins. In the very centre of the crowd, Sebastian and the sea-captain; but they and all the other figures are on a minute scale.
- 43 Interior of the *café*. Sebastian, surrounded by swarms of capering children. He looks now this way, now that, completely bewildered. Bunches of flowers fall upon him from nowhere. The children try to make him drink wine, clamber up and hang about his neck. He frowns at them, but without effect. The sea-captain stands close by. Only part of his face is visible; enough, however, to show that he still wears the same sardonic smile.

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- 44 The café floor. Countless feet in polished dancing shoes move ceaselessly across it. But soon the feet change into horses' hoofs, cranes' claws, hoofs of deer.
- 45 A corner of the café. A negro in a suit with gold buttons is playing on a huge drum. Soon the drum-sticks change into myriads of branches and the negro into a Camphor Tree.
- 46 At the foot of the tree lies Sebastian, unconscious. The captain stands with folded arms, looking down at him. Presently he picks Sebastian up and half drags, half carries him towards the cave.
- 47 The inside of the cave, looking towards the entrance. Sebastian clings to the sea-captain, his arms round his waist. The captain, still with the same smile on his lips, is pointing at something on the wall.
- 48 A corner of the cave. A bearded corpse hangs from the wall.
- 49 Half-length of the corpse. Sebastian is astonished and frightened. The captain jerks his head towards the thing on the wall and says something to Sebastian, who shudders and struggles desperately to cross himself. It is no use; once more he cannot do it.
- 50 Profile of the dead man, who is Judas. A hand thrusts forward out of nowhere and begins to massage the face. Immediately the head becomes transparent and one sees the brain, just as in the illustrations to a medical text-book. Within, but only dimly seen, lie thirty pieces of silver. But soon the faces of Christ's Disciples, some mocking, some pitying, appear within the head; and behind the faces, many things—houses, a lake, a cross, hands making obscene gestures, palm-branches, and aged men.
- 51 A corner of the cave. The body hanging on the wall begins gradually to change and in the end turns into two monkeys, playing pick-a-back.
- 52 Inside the cave. The sea-captain is talking earnestly to Sebastian. Sebastian's head is slumped upon his chest. He does not

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seem to hear what is said to him. The captain suddenly catches him by the arm and points towards the mouth of the cave.

- 53 Mountains by moonlight. They change into sharply pointed rocks, entirely covered with sea-anemones. A crowd of jelly-fish floating in mid-air. These too disappear, and all that is left is a single small globe, turning and turning, in a wide expanse of darkness. A knife slides towards the globe and cuts it exactly into two halves—the two halves of an orange. On the flat surface of one half appears a quavering magnetic needle.
- 54 Sebastian, clinging to the sea-captain. He stares fixedly into space, now looking entirely demented. The sea-captain still smiles sardonically and appears to be completely unmoved by Sebastian's condition. He takes something out of the folds of his cloak and holds it out. It is a skull.
- 55 Close-up of the sea-captain's hand, with the skull lying on it. From one eye-hole of the skull a moth flies out and flutters up into space. Then three more moths, then two, then five.
- 56 High up near the roof of the cave. The whole air is filled with countless moths, flying up and down, to and fro.
- 57 Close-up of one of the moths. Suddenly, in mid-flight, it changes into an eagle.
- 58 Inside the cave. Sebastian is still clinging to the sea-captain; his eyes are closed. Now his grip on the sea-captain's arm relaxes, and at once he falls flat upon the ground. But a moment later he sits up and again fixes his gaze on the captain's face.
- 59 Sebastian, on the ground. Propped on one hand, he clutches with the other at the Cross on the wall. At first he lays hand on it tremulously; then suddenly, with a firm grip.
- 60 Sebastian's hand, triumphantly holding the Cross aloft.
- 61 The sea-captain's back. He glances over his shoulder. There is a look of disappointment, of discomfiture on his face. He strokes his goatee beard.

SHOT

- 62 Early dawn. The sea-captain comes down the mountain track. Two monkeys spring out from behind him. When he reaches the Camphor Tree he halts for a moment and raises his hat, as though greeting some unseen person.
- 63 Sebastian lying on the floor of the cave, holding tight to the Cross. Outside the cave there are already patches of sunlight.
- 64 Close-up of Sebastian's face, seen from above, as he lies on the floor of the cave. Tears begin to trickle slowly down his cheeks—in the feeble early sunlight.
- 65 The mountain path in full sunlight. The black table suddenly appears; on its left side lie the ace and the court cards of Spades.
- 66 A living room flooded with sunlight. The master of the house has his hand on the half-opened door and seems to have just been seeing someone off. On a table in the corner, a wine-bottle, wine-glasses, playing cards. He comes to the table, sits down and lights a cigarette. Then he leans back comfortably and stretches himself. He has a goatee-beard and his face is that of the Dutch sea-captain.

[Translated by ARTHUR WALEY]

SELECTED NOTICE

1984 AND THE NECESSITY OF DOUBLETHINK

1984, by George Orwell. Secker and Warburg. 10s.

There are two quite different revolutionary movements in the modern world. There is the Marxian economic criticism. The capitalist system, says this criticism, contains within itself certain inherent contradictions, which make its catastrophe certain. Then will follow the intermediate period of the dictatorship of the proletariat out of which will eventually emerge the apocalyptic Communist society in which the State will wither away. No one has ever been able to discover any reason on Marxian principles why the collapse of capitalism should lead to the establishment of socialism. Yet as a negative critic of capitalism Marx had a lot that was interesting and acute to say and there was much truth in his contention that capitalism was of its nature a revolutionary and transient creed, bearing within itself the seeds of its own destruction.

But the fundamental metaphysical assumption behind the Marxian economics—as indeed, when it comes to that, behind most of the capitalist economics—is obviously absurd. We are told—not as a challenge but as an axiom from which all thinking starts—that men do always that which it is to their economic

interest to do, and, proceeding from that axiom, socialist thinkers assume that, when a war breaks out in a capitalist economy, it is greed for markets of the wicked capitalists which has caused that war. But it is obvious that, if the capitalists were solely concerned with their economic interests, they would most certainly see to it that there was no war. Their greed might, it is true, allow them to sanction some small colonial expedition, but clearly they would see that nothing is more destructive of wealth in general and nothing more likely to threaten their own predominance than a general war with Great Powers and capitalists on both sides. Purely selfish capitalists, true disciples of the materialistic theory of history, would obviously make any sort of arrangements of combine or cartel sooner than fight one another in competition. The capitalists of real life have, it is true, made many such arrangements and travelled far from perfect competition. But why have they not gone further? Why have they ever lent themselves to these wars so manifestly against their own interest?

In the same way with the Communists. If their victory is certain why do they put themselves to the inconvenience of fighting for it? Why do they not just let it come? If materialism is all, from what motive do the men of one generation deny themselves consumable goods and build up capital wealth from which only their descendents can benefit? It is true, of course, that the Marxists pretend that materialism is one thing and determinism is another and that fatalistic conclusions by no means follow from their premises. But their arguments when analysed prove little save that Marx and Engels often contradicted themselves and, in seeking to prove that they are not determinists, the Marxians only succeed in proving that they are not metaphysicians.

It is clear enough that the psychology of Marxianism is inadequate and that there is some other and stronger motive for conduct than the desire for material wealth working on both Communists and capitalists. And so, of course, there is. In the nineteenth century the most powerful attack on the Marxian theory came from a critic who made no mention of Marx's economics, and the most accurate prophecies of the future revolutionary society from another critic who took no interest at all in economics and in all probability had never heard of Marx. Bakunin—to name the first of these critics—believed as strongly as Marx believed that the capitalist society was doomed to destruction, but he thought it patent rubbish to believe that the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat could ever lead to the classless society of the Marxian vision. It was rubbish because the great corrupting influence in human affairs was power and it was absurd to imagine that a collection of men, be they Communists or be they who they may, could exercise absolute power for a period and not be influenced in their characters by it—that they would be content at the end quietly to lay it down and to allow the State to wither away. Similarly Dostoevski saw that, though the revolutionaries preached equality and freedom, their passion was pride and their lust was for power. All things are possible, and I will not say that it is logically impossible that a man should be willing to upset society solely out of a pure-minded passion for equality. But it is improbable. As Dr. Johnson said, 'I have lived long enough in the world to prevent me from expecting to find any action of which both the original motive and all the parts are good', and I am sure that such a being as a completely disinterested revolutionary has never existed. It takes a great deal of

trouble to make a revolution, and people do not take trouble unless their desires are engaged. No one in practice takes the trouble to lead a revolution unless he has a passion for power, and, whatever the slogans in whose name the revolution is made, equality is unlikely to emerge out of a revolution, in which the checks on power are destroyed by men who are themselves dominated by the passion for power.

Out of revolution must therefore almost inevitably come not a free society or a classless society, but a society of intolerable tyranny and of impossibly rigid class distinctions drawn in the name of equality. As Dostoevski makes Shigalov say, 'Starting from unlimited freedom, I arrive at unlimited despotism' . . . 'He suggests as a final solution of the question the division of mankind into two unequal parts. One-tenth enjoys absolute liberty and unbounded power over the other nine-tenths. The others have to give up all individuality and become, so to speak, a herd, and, through boundless submission, will by a series of regenerations attain primeval innocence, something like the Garden of Eden' . . . 'He suggests a system of spying. Every member of the society spies on the others, and it's his duty to inform against them. Everyone belongs to all and all to everyone. All are slaves and equal in their slavery. In extreme cases he advocates slander and murder, but the great thing about it is equality. To begin with, the level of education, science, and talents, is lowered. A high level of education and science is only possible for great intellects, and they are not wanted. The great intellects have always seized the power and been despots. Great intellects cannot help being despots and they've always done more harm than good. They will be banished or put to death. Cicero will have his tongue cut out, Copernicus will have his eyes put out, Shakespeare will be stoned—that's Shigalovism. Slaves are bound to be equal. There has never been either freedom or equality without despotism, but in the herd there is bound to be equality, and that's Shigalovism! . . . To level the mountains is a fine idea, not an absurd one. I am for Shigalov. Down with culture. We've had enough science! Without science we have material enough to go on for a thousand years, but one must have discipline. The one thing wanting in the world is discipline. The thirst for culture is an aristocratic thirst. The moment you have family ties or love you get the desire for property. We will destroy that desire; we'll make use of drunkenness, slander, spying; we'll make use of incredible corruption; we'll stifle every genius in its infancy. We'll reduce all to a common denominator! Complete equality! "We've learned a trade, and we are honest men; we need nothing more", that was an answer given by English working-men recently. Only the necessary is necessary, that's the motto of the whole world henceforward. But it needs a shock. That's for us, the directors, to look after. Slaves must have directors. Absolute submission, absolute loss of individuality, but once in thirty years Shigalov would let them have a shock and they would all suddenly begin eating one another up, to a certain point, simply as a precaution against boredom. Boredom is an aristocratic sensation. The Shigalovians will have no desires. Desire and suffering are our lot, but Shigalovism is for the slaves.'

Mr. Orwell and Mr. Aldous Huxley have made such pictures familiar enough to us in our own days but it is perhaps easy enough to foretell a termite future in such days as these. It was a greater feat to have foretold it in the optimistic

world in which the Inquisitor's vision had to jostle for its place alongside the rosy dawns of Swinburne's Songs and William Morris's *News from Nowhere*. For there is nothing peculiar to the writers of our age that they give us their pictures of the future. What is peculiar to our age is that no prophet today imagines a future that is not incomparably worse than the present. This is quite a new development. I remember that when I was at school I used to be told—simply as if it was one of the facts of life—that one of the great differences between us and the Romans was that the Romans used to put their golden age in the past, whereas we put ours in the future. I used to be told this and, since Mr. George Orwell was at school with me, I presume that he used to be told it, too.

The truth obviously is that, though the economic motive is one of the motives from which men act, it is a comparatively minor motive. Most of us like money well enough, but we are only willing to take a very limited amount of trouble to get it. If someone were to walk into the room and offer us unconditionally £100, there are few of us who would not accept, but there are few also who are willing to live a wholly uncongenial life simply because it will bring in a little bit more money. Such people do indeed exist and crashing bores they are, but they are happily rare.

The desire for power and consideration has been until recently a motive curiously underrated. It is not a wholly evil motive. There must be authority, if society is not to disintegrate, and therefore it is as well that there are some people who like the exercise of it. Since harsh things have sometimes to be done, it is even as well that there should be some people who like doing them. But there is, of course, great danger in the exercise of power—the more so when it is exercised by those who like it—and much to be said for the Platonic thesis that power should never be given save to those who dislike it. Civilized man has sought to steer between the evil of anarchy and the evil of power, by limiting all authority, by making him who exercises it responsible, subject to dismissal and subject to question.

But is the exercise of authority the means to the well-being of society or is it an end in itself? All the text-books have always piously assumed that authority existed as a means, that power is only exercised to achieve a purpose. In the world of real life from the school-prefect to the Führer, the truth is less certain. Who can say in what proportions it lies? There may be schoolboys of eighteen who honestly burn with a selfless passion for the good name of the House, but it can hardly be pretended that the average schoolboy who punishes with enthusiasm some peccadillo such as he himself had committed two years before, does so because he greatly minds such offences being committed. If his enthusiasm is aroused it is not because he minds the offences being committed but because he likes the exercise of power. And, in the same way, who shall say how far a judge pronounces sentences because he likes pronouncing sentences and how far he does it through a disinterested passion that right be done? how deeply a politician is interested in the measures which he advocates for their own sake? and how far the true passion of the Rt. Hon. Gentleman is to sit on a front-bench or a platform and to have his name often in the newspapers? whether he is interested primarily in what is done or whether he is interested primarily in being himself the person who does it? I do not ask for

a wholly cynical verdict, which would be as one-sided and unfair as the conventional verdict. But I merely say that the motives are more mixed than convention pretends.

Now, if we once admit the love of power to be a strong motive, even when kept under control, and to be an utterly dominant motive when uncontrolled, then it obviously follows that Bakunin's criticism of Marx is wholly valid and that Marxian Communism in practice, so far from being a movement dominated by economics, is a movement to which economics are wholly irrelevant and secondary. It may be true (for the sake of argument) that the first desire of the workers is to improve their material lot. But, if so, so what? What have the workers to say about what happens under the dictatorship of the proletariat? The 'Inner Party' dictates, and the members of the 'Inner Party' do not give their lives to the acquisition of material things, if only because their position of privilege enables them to acquire such things so easily. Their predominant motive is love of power.

Hence it comes, as Bakunin showed at the first, that Communism cannot of its nature ever lead to Communism—the intermediate stage of the dictatorship of the proletariat can never wither away into the classless society. Rauschnig truly warned us in the war that we made a radical error if we imagined that Hitler threw the world into turmoil in order to achieve this or that concrete end. It was the turmoil which was in itself the end. So, too, with the Communists. It is not an unfortunate accident that for the moment there is a shortage of consumer goods, that for the moment there are enemies of the regime at home or abroad—an accident to be overcome before the final consummation in peace and plenty. It is on the contrary in the very necessity of things that there should be shortages and there should be enemies. Like Voltaire's God, if they did not exist, they would have to be invented. For there cannot be power unless there is somebody upon whom to exercise it. There cannot be a hammer unless there is an anvil. There cannot be torture unless there are victims. There cannot be a system of privileges unless somebody is kept short.

Therefore Mr. Orwell has imagined that power in 1984 will be exercised by a new totalitarian party which realizes the true principles upon which the Nazi and Communist parties have in fact worked, but which repudiates with some scorn the pretended purposes for which these earlier parties professed to be working. It repudiates the sentimentality of the old Communists. Of course, the purpose of polity is not to raise the standard of living of everybody. The purpose of polity is to keep everybody at such a standard as shall make it most easy to submit them to the party's power. Of course, the purpose of polity is not to build a classless society. If there were a classless society, on whom should the party exercise its power?

The classical definition of the duty of a Communist has been given by Herr Brecht in real life: 'Who fights for Communism must be able to fight and not to fight, to say the truth and not to say the truth, to render a service and to deny a service, to keep a promise and to break a promise, to go into danger and to avoid danger, to be known and to be unknown. Who fights for Communism has of all the virtues only this—that he fights for Communism.' But it is clear that this is only the duty of the Communist subject, of a member of what 1984 calls 'the Outer Party'. You cannot obey unless there is a

master. There cannot be an Outer Party unless there is an Inner Party, and even within the Inner Party, though such a code may be sufficient so long as there is a serious fight on, will it be exciting enough when victory has been won? As O'Brien, the Inner Party leader in 1984, explains to Winston Smith, his victim, whom he has tortured:

'The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness: only power, pure power. What pure power means you will understand presently. We are different from all the oligarchies of the past, in that we know what we are doing. All the others, even those who resembled ourselves, were cowards and hypocrites. The German Nazis and the Russian Communists came very close to us in their methods, but they never had the courage to recognize their own motives. They pretended, perhaps they even believed, that they had seized power unwillingly and for a limited time, and that just round the corner there lay a paradise where human beings would be free and equal. We are not like that. We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means, it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power.'

The purpose of the party is to discover those of rebellious will, to break that will by every method of physical and mental torture, and only then, when the will has been broken and the error admitted, to kill the victim—and all this is done because the exercise of power is pleasant, not because these rebels constitute any serious danger to the regime—'loving not, hating not—just choosing so,' as Caliban said on Setebos.

So far from it being the object of this regime to destroy all opposition to itself, on the contrary it keeps alive an opposition—real or pretended, it is not quite certain which—as a foil to justify its own retention of power. The world is not under the rule of one Power. There are three Powers—Oceania, in which England and America are included, Eurasia, which contains all the Continent, and Eastasia. These Powers are permanently at war with one another, though the precise enemy changes from time to time and for no discernible reason. When there is a change of enemy, all records of a time when the other Power was the enemy are at once destroyed by the Ministry of Truth. The war is not carried on with any intention that it will lead to the victory of any Power but simply because conditions of war make the subjection of the population more simple.

A ruthless warfare is waged against romantic love. (Religion has, it seems, so wholly perished that it is no longer necessary to attack it.) All totalitarian movements are naturally and inevitably always at warfare with the family, for the family is a strong unit which claims for itself rights against the organization of society. There are two methods by which it is possible to attack the family. The first—the method used by revolutionaries in their days of propaganda and in their first days of power—is that of the gospel of free love. This gospel has the obvious advantage that it can at least be made to appear as a gospel of liberation. 'The ties of family are a tyranny,' it is easy enough to say. 'Let anyone go to bed with anyone else that he wishes. Why should the rest of us seek to interfere?' But we cannot treat a sexual appetite as we would treat an appetite

for sausages—satisfy it and get rid of it and be done with it. If it is not in some measure disciplined, it comes to dominate, and, if it dominates, then it becomes hateful to its victim. He hates that which enslaves him and because he loves therefore he hates. *Odi et amo*. That which is 'past reason hunted' is also 'past reason hated'. And therefore revolutions in their second phase turn from being excessively libertarian to being excessively puritanical. The romantic relation, since of its nature it implies that more attention is paid to one member of society than to the rest, is anti-social and to be condemned. It is not enough to attack marriage. Generation must be made as crude and animal and unromantic a business as possible, and thus it was the arch-crime of the hero and heroine of this book, Winston Smith and Julia, that they had fallen in love—the first task of their purgative torture to cure them of that love, a task which was very successfully accomplished.

The question that we naturally ask is, 'Will these things be?' And to that the first answer is:

'And when the pedants bade us mark
What cold, mechanic happenings
Must come, our souls said in the dark,
"Belike, but there are likelier things".'

To this Mr. Orwell will doubtless agree. Obviously many unexpected things will happen between now and 1984 which will falsify any detailed prophecy. That is not an important criticism. What is important is to decide whether Mr. Orwell is right in thinking that there are tendencies in modern society of which such a society as that of 1984 is the logical culmination. Mr. Orwell's argument is that in the past romantic dreams of equality did no great harm because they were not practicable. With the machine age and the twentieth century equality became practicable and therefore it became of overwhelming importance to those possessed with the passion for power to prevent it. It could only be prevented by the most extreme tyranny. 'Therefore,' writes Mr. Orwell, 'from the point of view of the new groups who were on the point of seizing power, human equality was no longer an ideal to be striven after, but a danger to be averted,' and it is from this that all political movements of our own day, parliamentary and dictatorial alike, derive their curious double nature. Of all the political movements which I have seen in my life-time, Conservative and Socialist, Communist and Fascist, two things have been true. They have appealed for power on the ground that they were going to give something to the people. They have exercised power by taking something from the people.

This necessity has imposed upon all politicians the necessity for talking a double language, and Mr. Orwell, judging reasonably that such duplicity will be most successfully practised by those who are able to impose it not only on their own words but even more on their own minds, imagines the Party of his future to have evolved a positive system of contradiction—what he calls 'doublethink'.

It would be, I think, unfair to Mr. Orwell to believe that this 'doublethink' was derived only from the example of our present totalitarian leaders. On the contrary, though we are told that in general the same sort of regimes are ruling all over the world in 1984, it is the regime as it exists in England which the book describes, and if Mr. Orwell's prophecies should prove correct and the

Parliamentary system should collapse in this country, 'doublethink' might well be its most notable legacy to its totalitarian successor. For 'doublethink' is a necessity to a Parliamentary regime to an extent far greater than is commonly understood. 'The Russians' in Professor Milyukov's famous phrase 'lack the cement of hypocrisy'. When they lie, they lie frankly and know that they are lying. But in a Parliamentary country it is essential if the continuity of the national life is to be preserved that the parties should not differ from one another very deeply. It is equally essential, if the public is going to continue to take the Parliamentary game seriously, that they should appear to differ from one another much more deeply than they do, and this appearance is far more likely to be convincing if the politicians themselves are deceived and themselves think of their differences as radical. 'Doublethink' is obviously a necessity of successful Parliamentary government—a necessity to a large extent at all times and a most desperate necessity at a time when the Government is claiming wide powers of interference in the daily and economic life of society. 'Doublethink' is indeed of the essence of capitalism, at least when capitalism parades as a Conservative creed. For capitalism is in its nature a revolutionary creed. It is its very boast that it destroys all traditional relationships save those which are to its own convenience, that it ruthlessly redistributes men and capital over the world, that it changes the face of continents, that it is dynamic and creative; and if so it cannot expect to change all else and keep unchanged the highly peculiar relationship between labour and capital which it had itself created. Capitalism must of its nature lead to something beyond capitalism.

At the same time the only popular part of trade unionism is its Conservative part. It defends the worker. It enables him to 'stay put' as against capitalism, which would move him about. As M. de Jouvenel has put it:

'The true picture of the British economy is that of a people each of whom is solidly anchored in his locality and his job and in which the main preoccupation of business enterprises is to convince the Government that it is in the national interest that they should continue to do what they are doing . . . They (the workers) use their power to resist attempts to move them, and their security means to them security in their actual jobs . . . Each group of workers supplying a particular service feels itself entitled to continue in that service and to maintain it just as it is. That which was the attitude of the mediaeval workman is the natural attitude of every workman . . . A workman in the nineteenth century was mobile enough, but the reason lay in his weakness . . . The Socialist regime in England has given a tremendous impetus to conservative tendencies. This is the Socialism of mediaeval Bruges, a regime such as the Florentine "arti" (guilds) built as they went.'

And yet the capitalists must appear as conservatives and the socialists as progressives. There is a good deal of 'doublethink' in this.

'If there is hope', thinks Winston Smith, 'it lies in the proles'—that is to say, the proletariat—those outside the party who are allowed to continue a human life though at a low cultural and material level. The only really attractive, and indeed the only really human, character in the book is the proletarian washerwoman, singing her cheap songs, as she hangs her clothes out on the line. But, as O'Brien shows, there is no chance that either the proles or anybody else will be able to make a revolution. Our own experience of the difficulties of

overthrowing totalitarian regimes from within makes this a very probable prophecy. It is indeed hard to see how a revolution can be made against the Inner Party, but, it may be asked, will not the Inner Party destroy itself by internal disruption? We have within us an impulse to co-operate with the order of things. We have also in our double nature an impulse to prove our independence by defying the order of things. The schoolboy throws a piece of indiarubber across the class-room, not because there is any especial purpose in doing so, but simply in order to assert himself. And so surely the Inner Party member will for a time be satisfied by the assertion of his irresistible power against those without the fold, but after a time he will get bored with the assertion of such power simply because it is irresistible and be tempted to challenge Big Brother simply because it is the only challenge where victory is not certain. It may be answered that Big Brother will be able to assert himself by effective purges as his prototypes have been able to assert themselves in Germany and Russia. It may be so. But is race quite irrelevant? Have the Prussian passion for submission, the Russian love of 'subornoz' no bearing on these stories? Even in Italy with all the will in the world, it was not possible to do many of the things that were done in Russia and Germany, and one cannot help feeling that a man called O'Brien, even in 1984, might not be quite as docile a second-fiddle as a man called Molotov in 1949. One cannot be sure.

But the greatest improbability in Mr. Orwell's story is that which asks us to believe that the three World Powers are able to maintain a perpetual war with one another and to keep it always 'phoney'—so restrained that there is no chance of any final victory nor of any overthrow of a defeated power. 'Absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely', and it is not given to a man, dominated by the lust of absolute power, permanently to keep his power absolute at home and to moderate its use abroad. It was abundantly to Hitler's interest to keep Stalin as an excuse for his own tyranny, but he had not the self-control to do so. Indeed, just as an excess of sex breeds a disgust with sex, so in the end an excess of power breeds such a contempt for its victims that the tyrant's final passion, all other passions sated, is for a holocaust of destruction for its own sake, for a flaming Ragnarok in which tyrant and victim alike go up in splendid and ultimate catastrophe. If the future of the human race is as Mr. Orwell depicts it, then it is unlikely that it will stop there—in this state of controlled warfare. It would be made more likely to lead to an utter destruction of all civilization from which such remnants as survived would have to start to build again from the very beginning. The suffering of such a catastrophe would be so enormous that no one would dare to wish for it or to work for it. But it is the probability that it is this which awaits us, that in a compelled return to simplicity we shall find again a release for those creative impulses for which tyranny and large-scale industrialism have failed to find a place and that in the long run such a catastrophe will prove to be a blessing. For good lies only in the mean, and superman is subman, and he who tries to make himself more than a man in fact makes himself less. All material sacrifices, if they be necessary, are worth making to preserve the humanity of man. 'If there is hope, it lies in the proles.'

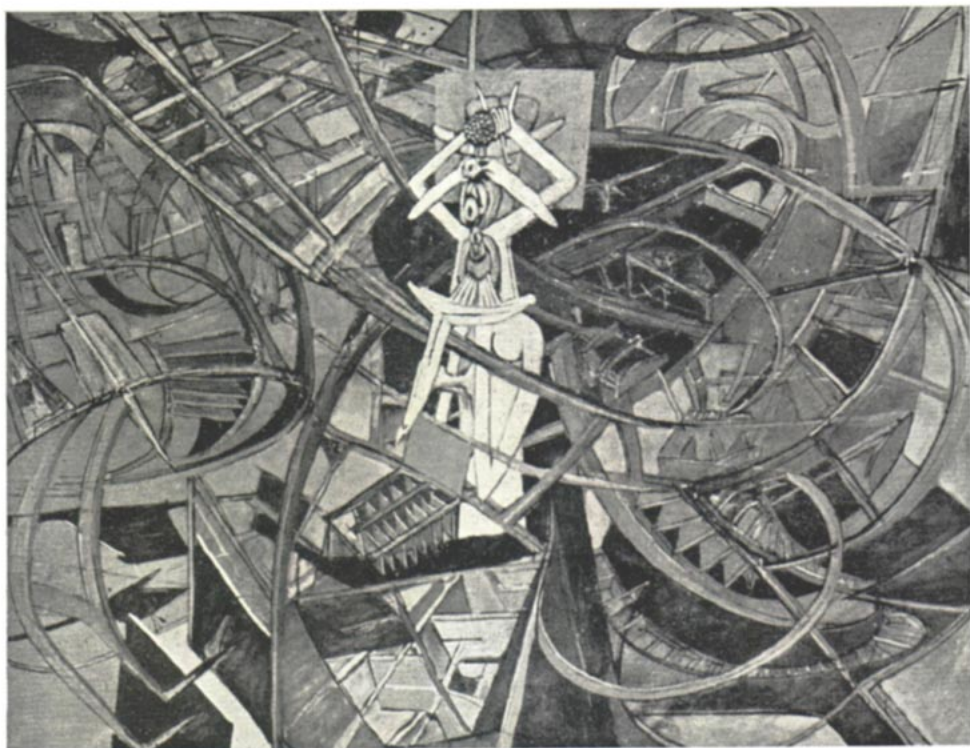
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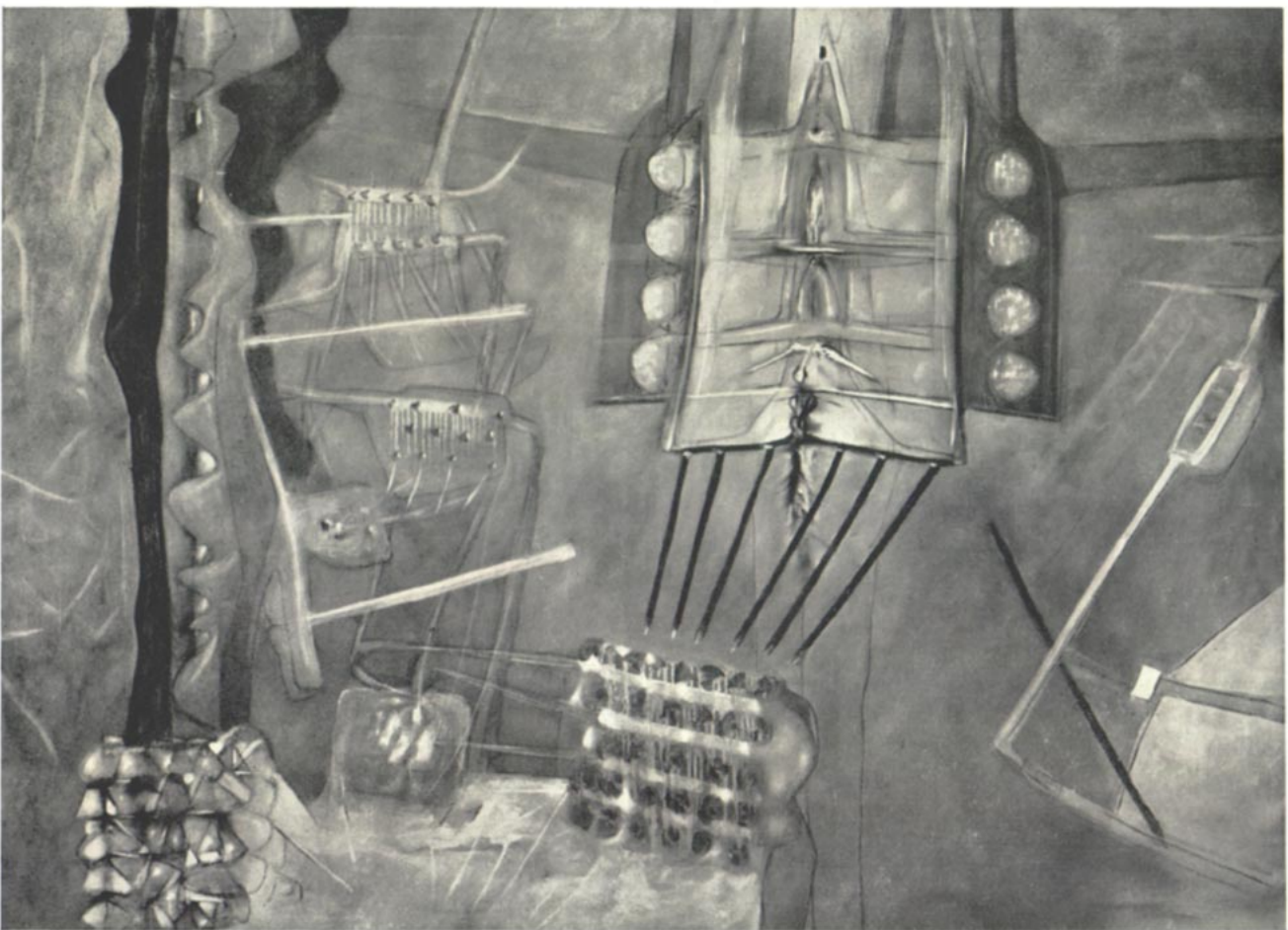
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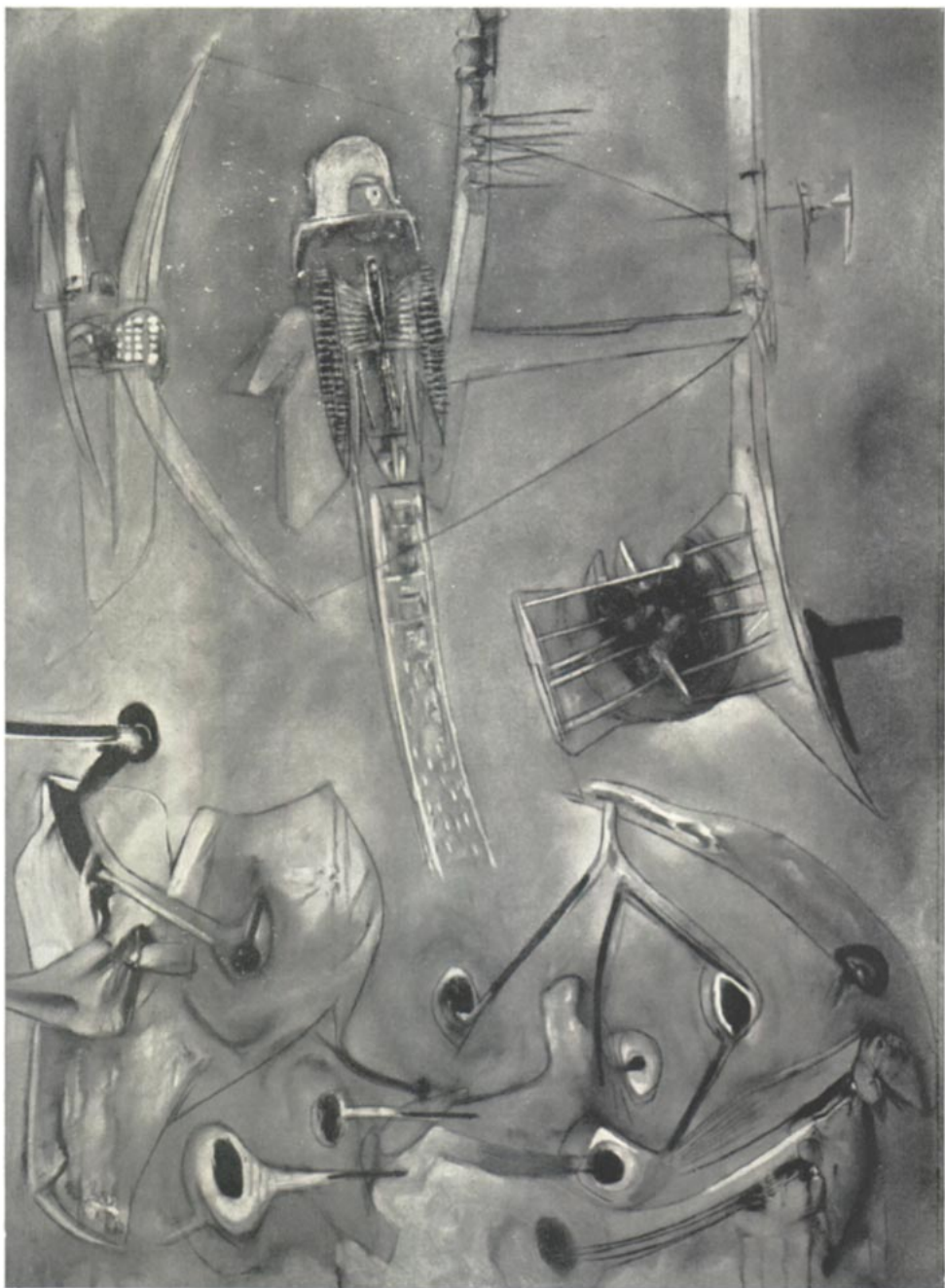
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